

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY

ROBIN HARD

Eighth Edition



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The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology

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The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology

Partially based on H.J. Rose's
A Handbook of Greek Mythology
Eighth edition

Robin Hard

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Eighth edition published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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First edition published by Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1928

Seventh edition published by Routledge 2003

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-65260-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-62413-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

In Memory of
LAUNCELOT FREDERIC HARD
1916–2002
and
JANE ELLIOTT HARD
1921–2015

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Preface

This new edition of this survey of Greek mythology has been largely rewritten and extensively rearranged with two particular ends in view, to make it more accessible to readers who have no special knowledge of the ancient world, and to adopt a less encyclopaedic approach by ensuring, above all, that the discussion is developed in a continuously readable form throughout each chapter. The previous arrangement by which alternative versions of myths or relatively obscure matters were considered separately in sections set in smaller type has thus been wholly abandoned, and greater effort has been made to ensure that the more important and interesting mythical tales and mythical figures do not get lost in a sea of minor material that will be of interest mainly to specialists. For the latter reason in particular, a less rigidly genealogical approach has been followed in the treatment of heroic mythology. Although it is useful and indeed necessary to gain some knowledge of the overarching genealogical system that was developed by the ancient mythographers to enable the mass of heroic myth to be ordered in to a consistent pseudo-historical pattern (see p. 210–11), that system was artificial in so far as families associated with different areas were gathered together into great families such as those of the Inachids and Deucalionids, and it is easier to gain an initial understanding of the general pattern of the mythical history of Greece by viewing it in relation to the interconnected histories of the main centres, and to the successive great adventures that drew together heroes from different parts of Greece, rather than proceeding methodically from one branch to another of each great family as in many parts of the previous edition. The genealogical framework has thus been kept more in the background, and I hope that the rearrangements that have been made as a consequence may make the book more approachable.

Although I originally set out to write this book because I was asked to produce a revised edition of H. J. Rose's classic *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, which was first published in 1928 and thus required adaptation if it was to continue to be useful some decades later, it proved difficult for various reasons to adapt it for modern use without rewriting it very extensively, and indeed adding much new material because Rose was much more comprehensive in his treatment of divine mythology than of heroic mythology. As a result, even the first edition of the present handbook was essentially a new work, at least in the chapters devoted to heroic mythology (which forms the greater part of Greek mythology because surprisingly few stories are recorded about how the gods acted among themselves); and the same is now true of the chapters on divine mythology in this revised edition. I have made no systematic attempt, however, to remove every sentence that was derived from Rose's book, and

I would like to acknowledge the debt that this present handbook owes to it.

Greek and Latin forms of names

The names of deities and heroes and heroines from Greek myth are given in their original Greek form, except in certain cases in the Latinized forms are almost always used in English, and it would thus not only be pedantic to retain the Greek form but might also cause confusion. We will thus talk of Clytemnestra, for instance, rather than of Klytaimnestra, and of Ajax rather than Aias; and modern or Latinized forms are used in general for place names (e.g. Boeotia rather Boiotia) and for the names of ancient Greek authors, as is customary outside purely academic literature. In most cases the differences between the Greek and Latin forms are not very great, and even if the Latin may be more familiar to many readers, no confusion need arise if the following distinctions are kept in mind:

- The final *-os* often found in men's names, e.g. Hippolytos and Anios, is not represented as *-us* as in Latin usage.
- The Greek diphthongs *ai* and *oi* (pronounced as in 'aisle' and 'coin') are not transliterated into *ae* and *oe* as in Latin usage. 'Aithra' and 'Oineus' will thus be found rather than 'Aethra' and 'Oeneus'.
- The Greek diphthongs – or strictly speaking, digraphs – *ei* and *ou* are not transliterated into long *i* and *u* as in Latin usage. 'Teiresias' will thus be found rather than 'Tiresias', and 'Boutes' rather than 'Butes'.

Latin usage has been retained in one respect, however, in this eighth edition of the handbook, in response to comments that I have received (and indeed my own preference when translating ancient mythological works). Since the letter *k* can look strange and unappealing in Greek names that are inserted into an English text, Greek kappa has been transcribed with a *c* rather than a *k* (except in a few cases such as Nike and Ker), and we will thus refer to Circe and the Cyclopes rather than to Kirke and the Kyklopes. As representing kappa, this *c* is properly a hard *c*.

When Greek tales from Roman sources are summarized in the text, the mythical figures who appear in them will naturally be cited under their original Greek names, rather than under the Latin names used in the Latin sources and in most English translations of them (e.g. of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or of Hyginus' mythological compendium).

Pronunciation of Greek names

For everyday purposes and in ordinary conversation, it is neither customary nor even desirable for English speakers to attempt to pronounce Greek names exactly as they would have been pronounced in, say, classical Athens. If a semi-Anglicized pronunciation is adopted, Greek names can easily be pronounced without grave distortion if a few basic rules are observed.

With regard to *consonants*, the Greek consonant chi is transliterated as *ch* and

represents an aspirated *k* (much as can be heard in the English word ‘cat’ when it is emphatically enunciated). In Greek names, it may be pronounced as a *k*, as when we speak of Achilles, but should certainly not be pronounced as in ‘chess’. The Greek *g* (gamma) is properly a hard *g* as in ‘game’, but it may be pronounced as a soft *g* in English as in ‘gin’ when that seems more natural (as in Aigeus, as against Aigyptos). Greek kappa, here transcribed as *c*, is likewise properly hard as has already been mentioned, but may also be pronounced as soft in English when that seems more natural (as in the name Eurydice).

With regard to *vowels*:

- There are no mute vowels in Greek words. In particular, a final *-e* and the *e* in final *-es* should always be sounded as a long *e*, as when we speak of Aphrodite and Socrates.
- In Greek, *ae*, *oe*, and *oo* (as found, for instance, in the names of Pasiphae, Callirhoe, and Acheloos) are never diphthongs, and each vowel should be sounded separately.
- In names, *ai* will usually be a diphthong and may be pronounced as in ‘aisle’, while the diphthongs *oi* may be pronounced as in coin, *au* as in ‘how’, and *eu* as in ‘eulogy’. The digraph *ei* (as found in names like Cheiron or Medeia) may be pronounced as in ‘pay’, and *ou* as in ‘boule’.

Latin names for Greek deities

The Romans liked to identify Greek gods with equivalent deities from the Roman and Italian tradition, and they would refer to Greek deities under their Latin names when narrating myths from the Greek tradition. Although their Greek names have been used in this book irrespective of whether specific narratives are derived from Greek or Latin sources, it should be kept in mind that Roman authors such as Ovid and Hyginus refer to the main Greek deities as follows:

Aphrodite as Venus

Ares as Mars

Artemis as Diana

Athena as Minerva

Cronos as Saturnus (anglicized to Saturn)

Demeter as Ceres

Dionysos often as Liber (if not as Dionysus or Bacchus)

Hephaistos as Volcanus (anglicized to Vulcan)

Hermes as Mercurius (anglicized to Mercury)

Hestia as Vesta

Poseidon as Neptunus (anglicized to Neptune)

Zeus as Iuppiter (anglicized to Jupiter)

The name of Persephone was corrupted to Proserpina in Latin, that of Leto to Latona,

and that of Heracles (whether as god or hero) to Hercules. Other names were translated, e.g. Eros to Cupido or Amor, or Pluto to Dis (see p. 93).

Periods of Greek history

When indicating the time of origin of Greek writings and legends, and so on, it is often convenient or indeed necessary to refer to broad eras of Greek history rather than to specific centuries or dates. The *Archaic* period can be regarded as having extended from 800 or 750 BC to 480, i.e. from the end of the dark ages to the time of the Persian Wars; the *Classical* period from 480 BC to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC (or more loosely as extending over the fifth and fourth centuries, which was generally speaking the period of the greatest cultural achievements of the Greeks); the *Hellenistic* period from the death of Alexander to the end of the first century BC; and the *Roman* period from the first century AD onwards (or more precisely from 31 BC, when Augustus defeated the forces of Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium).

When *quoting passages from ancient literature* I have made my own translations, which are designed above all to be clear and literal, and do not aim to provide an adequate impression of the literary qualities of the original.

And finally, the names of mythical characters are marked in capitals at the beginning of the main discussion (or main discussions) of their mythology, while bold type is used to indicate that a succession of mythical figures belong to a relevant common group, for instance as children of the same parents or as participants in a joint enterprise.

Abbreviations

The references placed after each chapters are intended above all to indicate the main ancient sources for mythical narratives and mythological information in the preceding text; references to secondary sources have been kept to a minimum. Except in the case of myths that are recorded in very few accounts or only a single account, the references to ancient accounts of mythical narratives are not exhaustive; although more sources, especially from the Latin literature, could often have been cited, it can be more confusing than helpful to pile up references to obscure, repetitive, or misleading accounts from the later record. Special attention is paid to the pre-Hellenistic tradition, and a special effort has been made to include accounts that are easily accessible in English translation (even if this is not possible in every case). For readers who wish to seek more detailed information on early sources, Timothy Gantz's *Early Greek Myth* (see the Bibliographical Note) can be recommended; and in the footnotes to his Loeb edition of Apollodorus' *Library* (Harvard, first published in 1921), Sir James Frazer provides useful lists of references to sources of every period for most important myths.

Conventional abbreviations are generally used for authors and their works. For Greek authors, these usually accord with those listed at the front of the Greek lexicon of Liddell and Scott; but longer forms have sometimes been used to make them more immediately intelligible to the general reader, and the names of works of literature are sometimes cited in English translation for the same reason. Some of the abbreviations that will be most frequently encountered are listed below; for further information on these and other authors and their works, please see the short dictionary of literary sources for Greek myth given in [Chapter 1](#).

Achilleid

Acusilaus

~~Adversus~~ *Nationes*

Aelian (V.H. = *Varia Historia*, i.e. *Historical Miscellany*)

Aeneid

Aeschylus

Agamemnon

Alcestis

Andromache

Annales

Anto~~hi~~hus Liberalis

~~Pindar~~ *Pindar Anthology* (commonly known as the *Greek Anthology*)

Apollodorus (i.e. the *Library*; Epit. = Epitome, referring to the latter part of the work which is preserved only in epitomized form)

Ap~~oll~~onius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*

Aratus, *Phenomena*
 Aristophanes
~~Aristotle~~
 Athenaeus
 Bacchylides
 Callimachus
 Cicero
 Clement of Alexandria
 Cratylus
 Cyclopes
 Dionysius
~~Divinae~~ *Institutes*
 Diodorus of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* = *Roman Antiquities*)
 Didorus of Sicily
Epigram
 Eratosthenes
 Etymologicum Genuinum
 Etymologicum Magnum
Eumenides
 Euripides
 Eustathius
Fasti
Gorgias
 Herodotus
 Hecataeus
~~Hercules~~ *Furens* (*Madness of Heracles*)
 Hellanicus
Hellenica
 Hesiod (*Theog.* = *Theogony*; *W.D.* = *Works and Days*; *Cat.* = the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*)
 Hippolytus
 Homer (*Il.* = *Iliad*; *Od.* = *Odyssey*)
~~Homeric~~ *Hymn*
 Hyginus (*Fab.* = *Fabulae*, i.e. *Mythical Tales*; *Astr.* = *Astronomia*)
 Hypothesis
Images
~~Divinae~~ *Institutes*
~~Iphigeneia~~ in Aulis
~~Iphigeneia~~ in Tauris
 Isocrates
 Jacoby (for the *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*)
 Diderot = (*Dialogues of the Gods*; *D. M.* = *Dialogues of the Dead*)
 Lucretius
 Lycophron
 Lyc.
Medeia
 Mimnermus
Mirabilia (*Marvellous Things Heard*)
~~Natural~~ *Animalium* (*On the Nature of Animals*)
Narrationes
~~Natural~~ *History*

Nicander
~~Nicolaus~~ Nicolaus of Damascus
~~Nicomachus~~ Nicomachean Ethics
 Oedipus
 Olin Colonos
 Onomasticon
 Orationes
 Orestes
 Ovid (*Met.* = *Metamorphoses*)
 Palaephatus
 Parthenius
 Pausanias
 Persians
 Phaedo
~~Phalaris~~ Phalarium Papyrus
 Philoctetes
 Philostratus
 Phoenissae (Phoenician Women)
 Pindar (*Ol.* = *Olympian Ode*, *Pyth.* = *Pythian Ode*, *Nem.* = *Nemean Ode*, *Isth.* = *Isthmian Ode*)
 Plato
 Plutarch (*Thes.* = *Life of Theseus* *Quaest. Graec.* = *Greek Questions* *Marc.* = *Life of Marcellus*)
~~Polyarchus~~ Polyarchus Papyrus
 Prometheus
 Pseudo-Aristotle
 Pseudo-Plato
~~Pseudo-Vergil~~ Pseudo-Vergil
 Quintus of Smyrna
 Quaestiones
~~Remedia~~ Remedia Amoris
 Republic
 Rhesus
 scholion
 Servius.
 Simonides
 Sophocles
 Statius
 Stephanus of Byzantium
~~Stephanus~~ Stephanus Byzantinus
 Strabo
 Stes.
 Stesichorus
 Stromata
 Suidas
 Suppliants
 Symposium
 Thebiad
 Theocritus
 Theriaca (*On Venomous Animals*)
 Thucydides
 Trachinae (*Women of Trachis*)
 Tragodopodagra
 Troades (*Trojan Women*)

Tryphiodorus
Tusculan Disputations
 Tzetzes
 Valerius Maximus Mythographer
 Velleius Paterculus
 Vergil (*Aen.* = *Aeneid*; *Ecl.* = *Eclogue*; *Georg.* = *Georgic*)
 Vita (*Life*)
 Xenophon
 Zenobius

Fragments from *early epic* (apart from Hesiodic fragments) are cited from *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. M. Davies (Göttingen, 1988). These are indicated by the inclusion of the name ‘Davies’ after the reference.

Fragments from early *lyric poetry* are cited from *Poetae Melici Graeci (PMG)*, ed. D.L. Page (Oxford, 1962); the excellent new volumes of *Greek Lyric* in the Loeb series (ed. D.A. Campbell, 5 vols, 1982 onwards), which provide parallel translations of the fragments, generally follow the same numbering. Fragments from *elegy and iambus* are cited from *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*, ed. M.L. West (Oxford, 1971). Fragments from *early mythographers* such as Pherecydes and Hellanicus are cited from the first volume of *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby (Leiden, 1923). References from this source are given as follows, Pher. 3F22 (for instance) or Hellanic. 4F85, in which the first number is the one assigned to the author and the second number refers to the relevant fragment. Some fragments from the works of minor historians are cited from later volumes of this great work. References are otherwise to standard collections of fragments that will be familiar to classical scholars, e.g. that of Merkelbach and West for Hesiodic fragments (Oxford, 1967), or those of Nauck or Radt for fragments from tragedy.

It is worth noting that in the classical field, for good practical reasons, the term ‘fragment’ is applied not only to surviving passages from lost works but also to reports on the contents of those works (although these are strictly testimonies rather than fragments).

1

Sources for Greek myth

The myths of the ancient Greeks, like the myths of most other cultures, were forever in a state of flux, undergoing constant change as they were passed on by word of mouth and retold in different ways by authors of successive ages. A handbook such as this must aim in the first place to provide a systematic account of the canon of early Greek myth, as initially established in archaic and classical poetic literature, especially early epic and tragedy, and then summarized and systematized in prose by the early mythographers. A good impression of the nature of the resulting vulgate or standard tradition, as conceived by mythographers of the Hellenistic or early Roman period, can be gained from the only general mythological handbook to survive from Greek antiquity, the *Library* of Apollodorus. The main myths and legends were organized into a pseudo-historical pattern to provide a remarkably coherent history of the universe and divine order and of the Greek world in the heroic era (which was conventionally thought to have ended in the period following the Trojan War); and this history was underpinned by rigorous systems of divine and heroic genealogy, which were essential if consistent chronologies were to be developed. The individual myths within this broad framework could be recorded in a variety of forms; even within the earlier literature, between the time, say, of Homer and that of Euripides, they could undergo a multitude of variations, and later developments could also leave their mark. Although powerful versions might tend to establish themselves in the general imagination at the expense of others, as in the case, for instance, of Aeschylus' account of the murder of Agamemnon (see p. 514), it is almost always misleading to talk as if there could be a standard version of a myth that was set in stone from some early time. Quite apart from merely narrating myths and placing them in their proper context within the wider body of divine or heroic myth, a handbook must therefore also attempt to trace the history of the more important myths, examining how they evolved over time and came to be narrated in differing ways by different authors in different genres. Since people who have an interest in Greek myth will not necessarily have any very extensive knowledge of ancient literature, and since some authors and writings that are important for myth are not widely familiar outside specialist circles, it was thought that it might thus be helpful to preface this handbook with a brief survey of the main literary sources for Greek myth. The relevant authors are listed separately in alphabetical order rather than discussed together in their historical setting to make it easier for readers to seek

further information on authors or works of literature that are mentioned in the main text.

Cross-references to other authors are marked by an asterisk preceding the name of the author. For reasons indicated in the preface, ancient Greek authors are referred to under the Anglicized form of their name (which is often of Latin origin) even though figures from myth are usually referred to under the proper Greek form of their name. The authors who are named in the list were Greek (or at least wrote in Greek) unless otherwise stated. The history of Greece after the dark ages is conventionally divided into four main eras, the Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman; please see the preface for the significance of these terms.

ACUSILAUS of Argos (probably writing at the end of the sixth century BC), early mythographer who wrote about the legendary history of his native Argolid and other regions, providing prose accounts of many legends from the epic tradition. Less is recorded about his writings than about those of his most important successors, *Pherecydes and *Hellanicus.

AELIAN (Claudius Aelianus, c. AD 172–235), prose author whose *Historical Miscellany* and anthology of animal stories contain some material of mythological interest. Translations of both are available in the Loeb series.

AESCHYLUS (525–456 BC), the earliest of the three great Athenian tragic poets whose works are not entirely lost. Of the eighty or ninety plays of Aeschylus, six of undoubted authenticity have survived. The three plays of the *Oresteia* trilogy, which portray a cycle of revenge within the Pelopid ruling family at Mycenae, are works of extraordinary profundity and resonance that can be ranked with the Homeric epics as the most imposing monuments of ancient literature. The first play in the trilogy, *Agamemnon*, shows how the Mycenaean king of that name was murdered by his wife Clytemnestra after he arrived back from the Trojan War; and the next play, *The Libation Bearers* (*Choephoroi*), shows how Agamemnon's son Orestes, who was sent abroad before the murder and grew up in exile, returned to Mycenae to avenge his father's death by killing Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthos. The final play in the trilogy, *The Eumenides*, shows how Orestes was then persecuted by the Erinyes (Furies), even though Apollo had sanctioned the killings, until he was acquitted of matricide at Athens at a trial superintended by Athena (see p. 516). The other surviving plays are stiffer and less immediately engaging. *The Seven against Thebes*, the last play in a Theban trilogy, tells how seven champions from Argos confronted seven Theban defenders at the seven gates of Thebes during the first of the two Theban Wars (see p. 357); and *The Suppliants*, which was the last play in a trilogy devoted to the myth of the Danaids, tells how the fifty Danaids approached the Argives as suppliants after fleeing from Egypt to avoid marrying their cousins, the fifty sons of Aegyptos. There is very little direct action in either play; indeed, more than half of the latter is composed of choral lyrics. *The Persians* is one of the rare tragedies that dealt with historical subjects, in this case the defeat of Xerxes during the Persian Wars. As regards *Prometheus Bound*, the seventh play attributed to

Aeschylus, there is disagreement on whether it is a genuine work of Aeschylus or was written at a slightly later period by another author (or at least heavily revised from a play by Aeschylus). It is remarkable in any case for its unusual portrayal of Zeus, who is presented as a newly established tyrant who exercises his power by the naked use of force. He has Prometheus nailed to a rock to punish him for having opposed his will by championing the interests of mortals; but Prometheus came to be released in a later play in the trilogy, and some sort of reconciliation must therefore have been achieved between Zeus and himself (see pp. 87–8).

ALCAEUS of Mytilene (born in the second half of the seventh century BC), an early lyric poet who was a contemporary and compatriot of Sappho.

ALCMAN (seventh century BC), early author of choral lyric who lived in Sparta.

ANTONINUS LIBERALIS (probably second century AD), mythographer, author of a surviving anthology of transformation myths, the *Collection of Metamorphoses*, which provides prose summaries of forty-nine stories of the kind. Most of the narratives are based on lost poetic accounts by two Hellenistic authors, *Nicander, who composed a poem in five books on mythical transformations, and a certain Boio or Boios (probably a pseudonym), who wrote a long poem called *Ornithogonia*, which contained rather artificial tales in which groups of people were turned into birds. There is an English translation by F. Celoria (London, 1992) and a French translation in the Budé series.

APOLLODORUS is the name traditionally ascribed to the author of the *Bibliothèque* or *Library*, the only comprehensive mythological handbook to have survived from classical antiquity. Although once regarded as a work of Apollodorus of Athens, a learned scholar of the second century BC who wrote about mythology and religion among other subjects, it is in fact a relatively late compilation of unpretentious character, probably written in the first or second century AD. The final sections of the book (dealing mainly with the Pelopids and the Trojan War) are preserved only in two prose epitomes discovered in the late nineteenth century; but the narrative is so concise throughout that most readers are unlikely to notice any change. The *Library* is in effect a mythical history of Greece, organized on a genealogical basis in accordance with the pattern established in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* (see under Hesiod) and followed by early prose mythographers such as *Pherecydes – the authority most frequently cited – and *Hellanicus; and since it is largely based on good early sources and very little has survived from the works of the early mythographers, it is extremely useful as a summary guide to the early vulgate tradition. Even if it may seem rather elementary in parts, it provides the best surviving accounts of many stories (hence the extensive use that has been made of it by compilers of mythological dictionaries and handbooks), and the stories are all placed in their proper context and accompanied by full genealogies. Translations are available in the Loeb series (in two volumes with useful references to other ancient sources) and Oxford World's Classics.

APOLLONIUS of Rhodes (third century BC), a learned Hellenistic poet, author of the *Argonautica*, an epic in four books that recounts the story of Jason's quest for the golden fleece and his travels with the Argonauts. Since nothing has survived of early the Argonautic epic, this is our main source for the legend along with the accompanying *scholia, which provide all manner of information on earlier versions of the story and local legends associated with the voyage and other relevant matters. From an artistic point of view, the poem is more impressive for its depiction of the changing feelings of Medea and the love that develops between her and Jason than for its portrayals of heroic action. We also possess an incomplete *Argonautica* in Latin by a poet of the first century AD, Valerius Flaccus, and a curious late poem in Greek, the *Orphic Argonautica*, which is largely dependent on Apollonius (although it also borrows from other sources and offers a divergent account of the return journey of the Argonauts). A French translation of the latter poem may be found in the Budé series. The *Fourth Pythian Ode* of Pindar provides the fullest earlier account of the story of the Argonauts.

ARATUS (c. 315–240 BC), Hellenistic didactic poet, author of an extremely popular astronomical poem, the *Phaenomena*, which describes the constellations and their risings and settings on the basis of information provided by the great astronomer Eudoxus of Cnidus (active in the first half of the fourth century BC). Although Aratus lays no great emphasis on astral mythology, recounting or referring to such myths on only twelve occasions, his poem did much to encourage popular interest in the constellations and their myths. The standard collection of constellation myths was compiled somewhat later by *Eratosthenes in a prose treatise. The scholia to the *Phaenomena* have more to say about the matter, as do the Latin adaptations of the poem by Germanicus Caesar (15 BC–AD 19) and Avienus (fourth century AD).

ARISTOPHANES (born mid-fifth century BC), Athenian comic playwright, author of eleven surviving plays. Although not based directly on traditional myths, as is usually the case with early tragedy, these are sometimes of value for what they reveal about particular myths or popular attitudes to myth and religion. *The Frogs*, in which Dionysos and his slave Xanthias make a visit to the land of the dead, may be singled out for what it reveals about the mythology and popular lore of the Underworld in the classical period.

ARISTOTLE (Aristoteles, 384–322 BC), philosopher with an encyclopaedic range of interest. His writings occasionally touch on mythological matters, and a spurious work in the Aristotelian corpus, *On Marvellous Things Heard*, records some curious mythological traditions relating to foreign parts. The remains of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Peplos* are of some interest for what they report about the fates of various warriors who fought at Troy.

ATHENAEUS (writing in about AD 200), author of the *Sophists' Banquet* (*Deipnosophistai*), an eccentric compilation in fifteen books that records more than anyone could possibly want to know about banquets and convivialities. Since Athenaeus draws on a wide range of sources and is never reluctant to provide a

quotation, much of value that would otherwise have been lost, some of it relating to myth, is preserved among the dross. There is a translation with a full index in the Loeb series.

BACCHYLIDES (died mid-fifth century BC), lyric poet, a nephew of Simonides and contemporary of Pindar. Substantial remains of his epinician odes (choral odes written in honour of victors at the games) and six of his dithyrambs have been recovered from papyri discovered in the nineteenth century. The former poems are constructed in a similar manner to those of *Pindar, with a mythical narrative at their heart; and although Bacchylides lacks the dash and genius of his greater contemporary, he has distinctive gifts of his own as a storyteller. A good impression of this may be gained from the fifth of his epinician odes, which describes how Heracles met and conversed with the shade of Meleager when he descended to the Underworld to fetch Cerberos, and how he was moved to tears by Meleager's account of his premature death. Another well-preserved ode describes how the daughters of Proitos, king of Tiryns, once offended Artemis and were stricken with madness until the goddess was appeased. The dithyrambs also contain attractive mythical narratives, describing, for instance, how Theseus proved to Minos that he was a son of Poseidon (see pp. 295–6) or how he first arrived in his ancestral homeland of Athens.

BION of Smyrna (late second century BC), a pastoral poet who is best known as the probable author of the *Lament for Adonis*.

CALLIMACHUS (c. 305–240 BC), Hellenistic poet and scholar who compiled the classified catalogue of the books in the library at Alexandria. His six *Hymns*, which are full of interesting mythological lore, have survived complete because some editor in late antiquity included them in a collection of hymns along with the *Homeric Hymns* and other poems of a comparable nature. Although modelled on the **Homeric Hymns*, they are altogether different in character, as would be expected, as highly sophisticated poems that are learnedly playful and often gently ironic in tone. The third hymn, addressed to Artemis, is particularly charming. The fifth tells how Teiresias came to be struck blind after seeing Athena naked (see p. 365), while the sixth describes how the Thessalian hero Erysichthon was punished with insatiable hunger after felling some trees in a grove of Demeter (see p. 114). Even if these poems may seem rather dry on first acquaintance, they can be very beguiling when one comes to appreciate their author's distinctive humour and tone of voice. The rest of his poetry is preserved in fragments alone, many recovered from papyri.

CICERO (106–43 BC), Roman politician, orator, and prose writer, who sometimes refers to Greek legends and mythical matters in his religious and philosophical treatises.

COLLUTHUS (probably fifth century AD), author of the *Rape of Helen*, a mercifully short epic poem in 394 lines; translated in the Loeb series.

CONON (probably writing at the end of the first century BC or beginning of the next), mythographer, author of a collection of fifty legends of varied nature in which foundation legends are especially prominent. It is preserved in an epitome prepared by the Byzantine scholar Photius (and a French translation is thus available in the Budé edition of Photius' *Library*).

DIODORUS SICULUS (i.e. of Sicily, first century BC), Greek Sicilian historian, author of a universal history in fourteen books. In contrast to historians of a more critical turn of mind, Diodorus did not exclude the period of legend from his survey, and the earlier books are thus of considerable value to the mythologist. As is understandable in a work with historical pretensions, he tended to favour rationalistic accounts from the Hellenistic period, but some of the material that he included as a consequence is of great interest in its own right, notably a report on *Euhemerus and extracts from two works of Dionysius Scytobrachion ('the Leather-armed', in reference to his prolific output) that offered novelistic versions of the myths of the Argonauts and the Amazons. The fourth book, however, which deals with the mythical history of the heartland of Greece, seems to have been largely based on a mythological handbook and includes more conventional material from the earlier vulgate. The biography of Heracles is worthy of special note since it provides a valuable supplement to that in *Apollodorus' handbook. There is an excellent translation in the Loeb series.

DIONYSIUS of Halicarnassus (first century BC), Greek literary critic and historian. He lived at Rome for over twenty years, where he compiled the *Roman Antiquities* (*Romaikē Archaialogikē*), a long and indeed tiresomely prolix history of Rome from the earliest times up until the Punic Wars. The first book, which deals with the prehistory of the area and the origins and founding of the city, has much to say about Greek legend in so far as it relates to Rome and Italy.

EPIC CYCLE, and early epic in general (apart from the works of *Homer and *Hesiod). (i) The epic cycle was a collection of early epic poems that were ordered into a cycle to provide a chronological account of major episodes from Greek myth. Although there may well have been different collections that varied in their content, the poems that are described as cyclic in the surviving records are an obscure poem called the *Titanomachia*, which dealt with the earliest history of the world and the gods (presumably covering some of the same ground as the *Theogony*), and two series of heroic epics, a shorter series dealing with the family of Oedipus and the Theban Wars and a longer series dealing with the Trojan War and its origins and aftermath. (ii) Although very little is known about the *Titanomachia* and the Theban epics, we are better informed about the poems of the Trojan cycle, partly because more fragments and testimonies have been preserved, and partly because we possess short summaries of their contents that were compiled in the Roman period by a certain *Proclus. The first of the Trojan epics, the *Cypria*, explained the origins of the war and offered an account of its progress up until the period covered in the *Iliad*. The significance of its title is wholly uncertain. The *Aithiopis* picks up the story again where the *Iliad* leaves off, describing how the Amazon Penthesileia and the Ethiopian

prince Memnon arrived to fight as allies of the Trojans (see pp. 474). It also described the death of Achilles, who was shot by Apollo and Paris as he was advancing towards the city after killing Memnon. The contents of the next two epics, the *Little Iliad* (*Ilias Mikra*) and the *Sack of Troy* (*Iliupersis*), seem to have overlapped to some extent. The former epic described the suicide of Aias (Ajax) and the events that immediately preceded the fall of Troy, and apparently went on to describe the sack itself, which was of course the subject of the latter poem. The *Returns* (*Nostoi*) provided a supplement to the *Odyssey* by describing the return journeys of the main Greek heroes other than Odysseus (see pp. 495), and the final epic in the series, a relatively late poem called the *Telegonia*, provided an eccentric account of the later life of Odysseus after his wanderings (see p. 512). Proclus' summaries and fragments from the poems are translated in the Hesiod volume in the Loeb series. (iii) Although we know the names of many other archaic epic poems and epic poets, little or nothing is recorded about most of them. Various poets wrote epics about Heracles, for instance, including a Spartan called Cinaethon and a Rhodian called Peisander, and, at a relatively late period, Herodotus' uncle Panyassis of Halicarnassus. Similar poems were written about Theseus, and the adventures of Jason and the Argonauts must also have been a popular subject; the *scholia to Apollonius tell us a certain amount about how the latter story was recounted in an early epic called the *Naupactia*. The legends of the Greek regions would also have been recounted in early epic; a poem called the *Phoronis* offered an account of the earliest history of the Argolid (see pp. 55–6) and a Corinthian epic poet called Eumelus offered a distinctive account of the earliest history of his own land (see pp 512–13). Since epic poems, oral and written, would have been the main literary medium for mythical narrative in the archaic period, it is salutary to remember how very little we know about these early epics. For a helpful guide to this area of Greek literature, with translations of relevant passages, see G.L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry; Eumelos to Panyassis* (London, 1966).

ERATOSTHENES (c. 285–194 BC), versatile Alexandrian scholar who compiled the standard collection of constellation myths, the *Catasterisms* (*Katasterismoi*). The short book of that title that has been transmitted to us under his name is an epitome that was prepared by some later author; further information about the contents of the original work can be found in the *Astronomy* of *Hyginus and the scholia to *Aratus' *Phaenomena* and to Germanicus' Latin adaptation of that poem. A translation of the epitome and the relevant sections of Hyginus' *Astronomy* can be found in Theony Condos, *Star Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (Grand Rapids, 1997) and Eratosthenes and Hyginus, *Constellation Myths* (Oxford, 2015).

EUHEMERUS of Messenia (writing in about 300 BC), author of the *Sacred Scriptures*, a book that explained the origin of the gods in rationalistic terms by suggesting that they had been great rulers and conquerors of the past who had come to be accorded divine honours. Although the original work is lost, much is known about it from what is recorded by *Diodorus (6.1, easily accessible in the Loeb translation) and Lactantius.

EURIPIDES (c. 485–406 BC), Athenian tragic poet, a slightly younger contemporary of Sophocles. Since two collections of his plays have survived, one an anthology put together in the Roman period and the other a section of an alphabetical edition of his complete works, we possess nineteen of his tragedies, far more than for Aeschylus and Sophocles. Seven relate to the Trojan War and its aftermath. *Iphigeneia at Aulis* tells how that daughter of Agamemnon was brought to sacrifice to enable the Greek fleet to sail to Troy (see pp. 463–4), while *Iphigeneia in Tauris* tells how she was recovered from the distant land of the Taurians by her brother Orestes some years after the war (see pp. 517–18). *Rhesus* (which may be wrongly ascribed to Euripides) dramatizes a tale from the *Iliad*, telling how the Thracian prince of that name was killed in his sleep by Odysseus and Diomedes after he arrived at Troy to fight as an ally of the Trojans. *The Trojan Women* (*Troades*) and *Hecuba* (*Hecabe*) are poignant tragedies that portray the fate of leading women of Troy after the fall of the city. *Helen* is a curious tragicomedy based on an unconventional version of Helen's legend in which a phantom of her accompanied Paris to Troy while she herself remained in Egypt during the years of the war (see p. 456). Hector's widow Andromache was said to have become the concubine of Achilles' son Neoptolemos in Epirus after the war; Euripides' *Andromache* presents her as falling victim to the jealousy of Neoptolemos' childless wife Hermione, who plots unsuccessfully to kill Andromache along with her young son (see p. 519). Three other tragedies of Euripides are devoted to Theban myth. *The Bacchae*, a very late work and perhaps the finest of the surviving plays, shows how Pentheus, king of Thebes, was visited with a gruesome punishment when he tried to outlaw the unbridled rites of Dionysos (see pp. 168–9). *The Phoenician Women* is a very long play (apparently with a post-Euripidean ending) that deals with the quarrel between the sons of Oedipus and the resulting Theban War, while *The Suppliants* tells how the mothers of the Argive chieftains who were killed in the conflict sought the help of Theseus after the Thebans forbade the burial of the Argive dead. The plots of two tragedies that are devoted to stories from Athenian myth, *Hippolytus* and *Ion*, are summarized below on p. 310 and 377–8. Three other plays deal with Heracles and his children. *Alcestis* tells how Heracles saved Alcestis from death after she volunteered to die in place of her husband Admetos, while *The Madness of Heracles* tells how the hero rescued his family from a usurper at Thebes, but then proceeded to slaughter his children in a fit of madness inspired by Hera. Soon after the death of Heracles, Eurystheus, king of Mycenae, tried to save himself from any future threat from the family by eliminating the hero's children; in *The Children of Heracles* (*Herakleidae*), Euripides shows how they appealed to the Athenians as suppliants and defeated and killed Eurystheus with their help (see pp. 277–8). In *Orestes*, the Mycenaean prince of that name narrowly escapes death after being brought to trial by the citizens of Argos for killing his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aigisthos; and *Medea* (*Medeia*) shows how the Colchian heroine of that name exacted revenge on her husband Jason after he told her that he was planning to abandon her to marry a Corinthian princess (see p. 412). And finally, *Cyclops* is the only complete Satyr-play to survive from antiquity; it offers a comical version of the Homeric story of Odysseus and Polyphemos, in which Seilenos and his Satyrs are presented as having been taken prisoner by the ogre just before the arrival of

Odysseus.

EUSTATHIUS (twelfth century AD), Byzantine scholar and churchman, author of long surviving commentaries on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These are of value in so far as they preserve material from the ancient scholarly tradition that would otherwise have been lost.

HELLANICUS of Lesbos (active in the second half of the fifth century BC), mythographer and author of writings on ethnography and chronology. More is recorded about his works than those of any other early mythographer apart from *Pherecydes. He compiled useful histories of various legendary families such as the Deucalionids and Atlantids, and left his mark on the subsequent tradition by refining and synchronizing the heroic genealogies. He was apparently an inelegant writer, however, whose narratives were less appealing than those of Pherecydes. Through his *Atthis*, a local history of Attica (which is mentioned by Thucydides, 1.97, though not with any great enthusiasm), he helped to inaugurate the distinctive genre of Atthidography (see p. 318).

HERODOTUS (fifth century BC), author of a long historical work in nine books, the *Histories* (*Historiai*, i.e. 'Investigations'), which provides an account of the conflict between Greece and Persia and its historical background. It is a very wide-ranging study that sets out to explain the growth of Persian power in relation to the histories of other lands outside Greece and developments within the Greek world itself. It is of great value as a source for legend and for matters relating to legend, all the more so since the author is always willing to digress and can never resist a good story.

HESIOD (c. 700 BC), Boeotian epic and didactic poet. (i) Two surviving poems, the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*, can be regarded as genuine works of Hesiod (even if it is not universally agreed that they can be ascribed to the same poet). One further poem, the *Shield*, which was certainly not of his authorship, has been transmitted to us under his name, and a number of other poems are ascribed to him in ancient sources. Very little is known of most of these other poems, but one of them, the *Catalogue of Women*, which was again of post-Hesiodic origin, was a mythological poem of considerable importance that can be partially reconstructed from many surviving fragments and testimonies. (ii) The *Theogony* (*Theogonia*, i.e. birth or generation of the gods) provides a comprehensive genealogical history of the origins of the gods, explaining how the universe and the main gods and goddesses came into being, and how the present divine order came to be established under the third ruler of the universe, Zeus. Since this was not only a very ancient account of these matters but came to be accepted as the standard account, the poem is a mythological document of the first importance, and we will take it as our main guide in [Chapter 2](#) and much of [Chapter 3](#). It also describes how Zeus quelled a revolt by the fearsome monster Typhon. The end of the poem was altered when the *Catalogue of Women* was appended to it, but although it is accepted that part of the concluding section of the present text is post-Hesiodic, scholars have disagreed as to where exactly the genuine work of Hesiod breaks off. The most distinguished modern editor

of the poem, M.L. West, has argued that the end comes at line 900, while others would place it later at line 929 or 962. (iii) As a poem that is mostly about farming and favourable and unfavourable days of the month, the *Works and Days* is less relevant to our subject, except in the two sections of the poem that narrate the story of the first woman Pandora (42–105) and the myth of the five races (106–201, see p. 31). (iv) The only other complete poem to be preserved under Hesiod's name is the *Shield (Aspis)*, a short work in 480 lines that describes how Heracles defeated the Thessalian villain Cycnos and his divine father Ares in two successive fights (see p. 267). The poem is known as the *Shield* because more than a third of it is devoted to a description of the images on Heracles' shield, in a passage that was evidently modelled on Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*. It is prefaced with an *ehoie* (see below) from the *Catalogue* relating to Alcmena and was presumably written after that poem in the sixth century BC. A translation can be found in the Hesiod volume in the Loeb series; since the author was too incompetent to be able to organize his material properly or bring his subject to life, the poem cannot be said to be anything more than a historical curiosity. (v) Most of the other poems that were ascribed to Hesiod are little more than names to us. They include an astronomical poem known as the *Astronomia* and a book of moral precepts known as the *Maxims of Cheiron*, and mythological poems such as the *Melampodia*, which recounted the legends of Melampous and other seers (providing for instance an account of the contest in divination between Mopsos and Calchas, see p. 500), and the *Aigimios*, which is named after a Dorian associate of Heracles but apparently recounted a variety of legends including that of Io. (v) The genealogical epic known as the *Catalogue of Women* – or simply the *Catalogue* – is the only pseudo-Hesiodic poem (apart of course from the *Shield*) for which we possess substantial remains. Well after the lifetime of Hesiod, probably in the early sixth century BC, some unknown author decided to write a continuation to the *Theogony* so as to provide a genealogical history of the main heroic families also. As was noted above, the end of the *Theogony* was altered quite radically to prepare for the transition to this new subject-matter, as can be appreciated from the present state of the text. Since the origin of each of the main heroic lines was traced to a mating between a god and a mortal woman, the new poem (or relevant portion of the combined poem) came to be known as the *Catalogue of Women*; it was also called the *Ehoiai* because the story of each of these women was introduced with the formulaic phrase *ē hoiē*, 'or like she who ...'. From its semi-divine beginning, each heroic line would have been followed down to the period of the Trojan War or thereabouts, and the principal legends associated with the members of the line would have been narrated, usually quite briefly, as the successive heroes and heroines were introduced. It was a work of the first importance, comparable in its own way to the *Theogony*, because it established the Panhellenic system of heroic genealogy that was adopted and refined by the early prose mythographers (such as *Pherecydes and *Hellanicus) and can still be recognized, though with many variations from the later tradition, in the mythological handbook of *Apollodorus. In tracing the histories of such families as the Inachids, Deucalionids, and Atlantids in the second part of the present handbook, we will be following the lines that were laid down by the *Catalogue*-poet. Although

no manuscripts of the poem have survived, a fair number of quotations and testimonies can be found in the works of ancient authors, and many additional fragments, some quite extensive, have been recovered from papyri. As a consequence, a surprising amount has come to be known about the structure of the poem, and parts of it can be reconstructed in some detail; for a full discussion, see M.L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford, 1985). Many of the individual fragments are translated in the Hesiod volume in the Loeb series, but they lose much of their meaning when taken out of context. There is an Italian parallel translation of the standard edition of Merkelbach and West (from *Fragmenta Hesiodica*, Oxford, 1967) in the Hesiod volume in the French Pléiade series; it may be hoped that someone will publish a similar translation in English one day.

HOMER (probably late eighth century BC). (i) The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the national epics of the Greeks, were traditionally ascribed to a poet called Homer (Homeros), on whom we have no trustworthy information. There is disagreement on whether the two poems can be ascribed to the same author (and indeed on whether each of them was basically the work of a single author, although scholars have been less inclined to attempt to trace different sections to different origins since greater understanding has been gained of the process of creation in oral poetry). There is good reason to suppose that they were composed in Ionia on the west coast of Asia Minor. They certainly contain some later interpolations, even if these cannot always be recognized with any assurance. (ii) In contrast to the usual pattern in epic, in which a succession of episodes would be described in simple chronological order and the traditional history of the war or adventure or whatever provided the principle of unity, the entire narrative of the *Iliad* is ordered around a single incident in the tenth year of the Trojan War – the anger and withdrawal of Achilles – and the time-span is comparatively restricted. The main action is concentrated in a period of only four days and nights, and the span of the whole story does not extend beyond fifty-one days; but the poem is artfully constructed so as to make it seem that it epitomizes the entire trajectory of the war. The articulating theme of the poem, as announced in the first line, is the wrath of Achilles, the mightiest of the Greek warriors, who withdraws from the fighting in anger at being deprived of his captive maiden Briseis by the Greek commander Agamemnon, giving the Trojans an opportunity to advance out of their city and place the Greek army under severe threat; but after his closest friend Patroclus is killed, he returns to the battlefield to seek vengeance and drives the Trojans back, killing many of them including their greatest warrior, Hector. A full summary of the plot may be found on pp. 427ff. (iii) The poem makes many allusions to the preceding history of the war and to its conclusion and aftermath, and also refers to events from the earlier lives of the participants and to stories from other cycles of legend and from divine mythology. The loquacious Nestor likes to reminisce about his youthful adventures in the western Peloponnese, and Phoinix recounts the story of the Aetolian hero Meleager while trying to persuade Achilles to return to the fight (see p. 473); but full narratives of stories that have no direct connection with the war are naturally infrequent. The long muster list in the second book (the so-called ‘catalogue of ships’, 2.493–759) preserves a large amount of very

ancient information about the geography of Greece in the legendary era and the heroic families that were supposed to have ruled in it. A useful summary of the mythical history of Troy is provided by Aineias in the twentieth book (208–40). The poem also has much to say about the lives and characters of the gods. For instance, it records two versions of myth in which the young Hephaistos was said to have been hurled down from Olympos (see p. 177). (iv) The hero of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, was a cunning and resourceful warrior who came from the island of Ithaca off the west coast of Greece. The epic describes how he wandered through distant seas for ten long years after being driven far off course while sailing home from Troy, and how, on his return, he exacted vengeance against a crowd of local noblemen who had been revelling in his palace during his absence, squandering his property, and courting his wife. See pp. 505ff. for a summary of his adventures. The epic falls into three main parts. The first four books (the so-called *Telemachia*) tell how Telemachos, the young son of Odysseus, visited Nestor at Pylos and Menelaos at Sparta to seek news of his missing father; the next eight books (5–12) describe the adventures of Odysseus in foreign seas, partly as narrated by Odysseus himself at a banquet in his last port of call (9–12); and the last twelve books tell how he arrived home in Ithaca, exacted vengeance against the suitors after due preparation, and was reunited with his faithful wife Penelope. In books 3 and 4, the poem reveals a fair amount about the events that immediately followed the sack of Troy, and about how other heroes, including Agamemnon, fared during their return voyages and after arriving home (see pp. 494ff.).

HOMERIC HYMNS, a collection of thirty-three poems in epic metre addressed to various greater and lesser deities. Although widely ascribed to Homer in ancient times, they are in fact of varied authorship and were composed at widely differing times, ranging from the seventh or eighth century BC to the fifth century or even later. While many are no more than brief preludes (*prooimia*) that would be chanted by rhapsodes before epic recitations, a few are substantial narrative poems of considerable charm that describe important episodes in the lives of the gods. The *Hymn to Demeter* (no. 2) tells how the corn-goddess Demeter searched for her daughter Persephone after she was abducted by Hades, and finally forced Zeus to take action on her behalf by causing the earth to remain barren and so depriving the gods of their sacrifices (see pp. 94ff.). The poem explains the origin of the Eleusinian Mysteries and alludes to various aspects of Eleusinian cult, and was presumably composed in the area of Eleusis, perhaps in the late seventh century BC. The *Hymn to Apollo* (no. 3), which may well have been put together from two originally separate poems, describes how Leto came to give birth to her divine twins Apollo and Artemis on the island of Delos, and goes on to explain how Apollo came to establish his oracle and shrine at Delphi (see pp. 134 and 136–7). The *Hymn to Hermes* (no. 4), which is broadly humorous in tone, describes how the infant Hermes set off to rustle the cattle of Hermes on the day of his birth, but reached an accommodation with Apollo soon afterwards and was assigned his main functions as a god (see pp. 172ff.). The longer of the two hymns addressed to Aphrodite, the fifth, describes how the goddess seduced Anchises, a member of the Trojan royal family, on Mount Ida in

the Troad and conceived Aineias to him (see p. 445). The much shorter *Hymn to Dionysos* (no. 7) describes how some pirates tried to abduct the god in his youth, provoking him to transform them into dolphins after first working some miracles as a manifestation of his power (see pp. 166–7). The short *Hymn to Pan* (no. 19) is also of some interest for its description of the nature and birth of the goat-footed god. Translations are available in the Hesiod volume in the Loeb series and elsewhere; they make delightful reading even in a plain prose translation.

HYGINUS (Gaius Julius Hyginus), a learned freedman of Augustus who became the librarian of the Palatine Library, the putative author of two works of mythological interest, the *Fabulae* (i.e. *Mythical Tales*, also known as the *Genealogiae*), a handbook of mythology, and the *Astronomia*, a popular treatise on astronomy. Both books were compiled from Greek sources. Since their author was a scholar of limited competence who could make elementary mistakes in translating from the Greek, it is generally agreed that these cannot be genuine works of Hyginus, and they were probably written after his time in the second century AD. The 220 chapters of the *Fabulae* consist either of brief mythological narratives or of catalogues (e.g. of mothers who killed their sons, persons who were suckled by animals, or inventors and their inventions). Although the sources of the narratives are rarely indicated, the book seems to draw most heavily on tragic sources. The second book of the *Astronomia* contains the fullest surviving collection of constellation myths, derived mainly from *Eratosthenes. English translations of the *Fabulae* and this ‘poetic astronomy’ may be found in Hyginus, *The Myths*, ed. and trans. M. Grant (Lawrence, Kansas, 1960), and there are good French translations, with useful notes, in the Budé series.

LUCIAN (Loukianos, second century AD), orator and prose writer of Syrian birth who quite often touches on mythological matters in his copious works. In some of his satirical dialogues, most notably the *Dialogues of the Gods* and *Dialogues of the Sea-gods*, he makes fun of the traditional portrayal of the gods and traditional themes from myth, while other works, such as *Charon* and the *Dialogues of the Dead*, are of interest in relation to traditional ideas about the afterlife and Underworld.

LYCOPHRON (born c. 320 BC), Hellenistic poet, author of a mythological puzzle-poem, the *Alexandra*, in which the Trojan seer Cassandra delivers riddling prophecies about the fall of Troy and the subsequent fates of those who took part in the war. Although not exactly pleasurable reading, it is of great value as a source of mythological information if read in conjunction with the extensive ancient *scholia and the Byzantine commentary of John Tzetzes. Particular attention is devoted to the Italian west. Primarily on account of a seemingly anachronistic reference to Roman power (*Alexandra* 1227ff.), some scholars have argued that the poem must have been written somewhat later by another author in the second century BC.

MIMNERMUS (second half of the sixth century BC), elegiac poet. The fragments of one of his poems, the *Nanno*, contain interesting mythical allusions to Jason’s quest and to Helios’ nightly journey to the place of his rising (see p. 42).

MOSCHUS of Syracuse (second century BC), bucolic poet, author of an attractive epyllion or miniature epic, the *Europa*, which tells how Zeus assumed the form of a bull to abduct the heroine of that name from Phoenicia to Crete.

MUSAEUS (probably late fifth century AD), author of an attractive miniature epic that tells the tragic story of Hero and Leander, two lovers who lived on opposite banks of the Hellespont (see p. 570); a translation may be found in the Loeb series (in the same volume as the fragments of Callimachus).

NICANDER of Colophon (second century BC), Hellenistic poet. Two of his didactic poems, the *Theriaka*, and *Alexipharmaka* (which dealt with poisonous animals and antidotes to poisons respectively), have survived intact, but he was of greater importance from a mythological point of view for his lost *Heteroioumena* (i.e. *Metamorphoses*), a collection of transformation myths. *Ovid drew on the poem when writing his *Metamorphoses*, and *Antoninus Liberalis provides summaries of some of the stories recounted in it.

NONNUS (probably fifth century AD), of Panopolis in Egypt, author of the *Dionysiaca*, an interminable epic in forty-eight books that deals with Dionysos and his expedition to India; translated in the Loeb series.

OVID (Publius Ovidius Naso, 70–19 BC), Roman poet who had an extensive knowledge of Greek myth and Alexandrian poetry. His most ambitious poem, the *Metamorphoses*, is a collection of transformation legends in fifteen books. The poem begins with the origin of the universe and ends with the apotheosis of Romulus, and the intervening stories are skilfully woven together with regular alterations in tone to ensure that it forms a unified epic-style poem. Except in the last two books, which are devoted to Roman and Italian matters, the stories are drawn almost exclusively from Greek legend. Some were quite ancient while others originated in the more recent literature, for transformations were a popular theme among Hellenistic poets such as *Nicander. Most of the fictional letters in Ovid's *Heroides* are addressed from heroines of Greek legend to their lovers or husbands, and the poet also refers to Greek myths elsewhere in his poems.

PALAEPHATUS (probably fourth century BC), author of the *Incredible Tales* (*Peri Apistōn*), a mythographical work that provides rationalistic (if highly implausible) explanations for the origins of seemingly impossible tales from heroic legend, for instance those that involve monsters. The author, who may have written under a pseudonym, was apparently an associate of Aristotle who was active in the latter part of the fourth century BC; if that is the case, the book provides the earliest evidence for a number of important legends. A translation and commentary are available, by J. Stern (Wauconda, Illinois, 1996). A similar work of later origin has been transmitted to us under the name of Heraclitus. In contrast to *Euhemerus and his followers, such authors did not attempt to rationalize divine myths.

PARTHENIUS of Nicaea (first century BC), late Hellenistic poet and mythographer,

author of *Sufferings in Love* (*Erōtika Pathēmata*), a collection of prose summaries of thirty-six love stories, mostly obscure and of relatively late origin. In relation to early myth, many are of interest for the way in which standard motifs from earlier myth are recycled in them. Translations are available in the Loeb series and in J.L. Lightfoot's edition of the works of Parthenius (Oxford, 1999, with illuminating discussions and commentary).

PAUSANIAS (second century AD), author of the *Description of Greece* in ten books, covering the entire Peloponnese and much of Central Greece. Pausanias visited all the main towns and other sites of interest in these areas to investigate their traditions and topography, monuments and antiquities, and cults and local mythology. The resulting work is a source of the very highest value for the mythologist. It records local traditions about the ancient history of the cities and lands that he passed through, and many legends that were attached to local monuments and landmarks; and although it has to be remembered that he collected this local material at a relatively late period, he also preserves a large amount of information that relates unquestionably to the early mythical tradition, both in references to early literature (for he was widely read and was willing to extend his reading to seek answers to specific questions) and in descriptions of early works of art such as the mural paintings of Polygnotos (fifth century BC) or the chest of Cypselos (sixth century BC). For mythological purposes at least, the edition in the Loeb series is to be preferred to the Penguin translation, which omits some heroic genealogies without any immediate warning and translates some Greek names into English in a haphazard and confusing manner.

PHERECYDES of Athens (probably active in the first half of the fifth century BC), early mythographer, a prolific writer who compiled comprehensive accounts of the legendary history of Greece, drawing most of his material from early epic and organizing it on a genealogical basis in accordance with the procedure developed in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* (see under Hesiod). These works of Pherecydes, which were known as the *Historiai* or *Genealogiai*, were published by the Alexandrian scholars in an edition of ten books, and were very widely consulted by scholars and poets as a standard source for narratives from early legend. As we know from a few surviving passages, the stories were recounted with pleasing simplicity in a naïve paratactic style. Although no manuscripts of Pherecydes' writings have been transmitted to us, we know a fair amount about their contents, largely because the scholiasts refer to them with notable frequency. *Apollodorus cites Pherecydes by name thirteen times in his little manual, more than any other authority, and uses him as his main source in some sections of the book (for instance in his account of the life of Perseus).

PINDAR (c. 518–438 BC), author of choral lyric, perhaps the greatest lyric poet of ancient Greece. In addition to numerous fragments, four complete books of his poetry have survived, consisting of odes that he wrote in honour of victors at the four main athletic festivals, the Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games. These epinician odes (i.e. 'odes of victory') are of greater value as sources of myth

than might be supposed, for the poet rarely devotes many lines to the victory or victor but soon passes on to a mythical narrative after a short prelude, and devotes much of the poem to the myth before returning to praise the victor and his prowess or good fortune at the end. His victory is most effectively ennobled by being presented against this mythical background. The myth could be introduced on a variety of pretexts, typically in connection with the family history of the victor or with the traditions of his homeland or the place of his victory. Although the narratives may be quite long, they are rarely developed in a straightforward chronological manner as in epic poetry, for the poet tends to concentrate on particular aspects of the story that are relevant to his 'argument', and to start in the middle of the story and range backwards and forwards in time. Pindar recounts or refers to a great many myths in his poems and provides the first surviving mention or proper account of many a story. Three full and relatively straightforward narratives may be singled out by way of example. In his *Seventh Olympian Ode*, Pindar explains how the Sun-god Helios came to win the island of Rhodes as his special domain (see p. 41); in his *Ninth Pythian Ode*, he tells how Apollo abducted the nymph Cyrene to North Africa as his mistress after seeing her wrestling with a lion in her native Thessaly (see p. 146); and in his *Sixth Olympian Ode*, he describes the birth, exposure, and rescue of the seer Iamos (see p. 549). The oldest detailed account of the very ancient myth of the Argonauts may be found in the *Fourth Pythian Ode*.

PLATO (c. 429–347 BC), Athenian philosopher and author of philosophical dialogues. Although his writings cannot be said to be of any great value as a source for myth (except perhaps in relation to the mythology of the Underworld and afterlife), they are full of mythological allusions and contain distinctive philosophical myths of Plato's own invention.

PLINY the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, AD 23/4–79), Roman writer, author of the *Natural History* in thirty-seven books, an encyclopaedia of the natural world that records a vast amount of miscellaneous information.

PLUTARCH (mid-first century AD until after 120), author of biographies and of essays and dialogues on moral, religious, and other subjects. He quite often touches on mythological matters in the latter works (which are known collectively as the *Moralia*). The apocryphal myths in the pseudo-Plutarchean *Greek and Roman Parallel Stories* and *On Rivers* should not be taken too seriously. A very useful life of Theseus may be found among Plutarch's biographies, but his life of Heracles is lost (which would be more regrettable if we did not possess full accounts of that hero's life by Diodorus and Apollodorus).

PROCLUS, the author of some surviving summaries of the Trojan epics in the *epic cycle. It is not known whether the Proclus in question was the Neoplatonic philosopher of that name (fifth century AD) or a grammarian of the second century AD.

QUINTUS of Smyrna (probably fourth century AD), author of a late epic poem in fourteen books, the *Posthomerica*, which was written to provide a synoptic account of the final stages and conclusion of the Trojan War after the poems of the *epic cycle had ceased to be read (or at least fallen from favour). It describes all that took place after the period covered in the *Iliad*, ending with the sack of Troy and the perilous return voyage of the conquering army. Although Quintus would have drawn much of his material from fairly late sources, he was deliberately conservative in his choice of sources, taking care to avoid novelistic or revisionist accounts. A translation is available in the Loeb series; although there are some attractive passages, the poem as a whole is long-winded and artificial and does not often come to life.

SAPPHO of Lesbos (born late seventh century BC), author of lyric poetry, mainly of an intimate character.

SCHOLIA, ancient explanatory notes preserved in the margins of ancient writings. Since myth so often provided the subject-matter for Greek poetry and drama, many of these are inevitably devoted to mythological matters, narrating myths to account for allusions in the text in question, explaining specific points that arise from narratives in the text, citing parallels and variants from other sources (often from literature that is lost to us), and so on. Most of what we know of early mythographers such as *Pherecydes and *Hellanicus is derived from scholia. The scholia to the Homeric epics and to Pindar, Euripides, Apollonius, and Lycophron are particularly valuable as sources of mythological information. Latin scholia can also be useful to the student of Greek mythology, notably the scholia to the poems of Vergil and the Theban epic of Statius.

SENECA (c. 40 BC–AD 65), Roman politician, philosopher and writer, author of nine melodramatic tragedies that were based on stories from Greek legend and modelled on plays of the Attic tragedians, especially Euripides, namely the *Hercules Furens*, *Hercules on Oeta*, *Medea*, *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes*, *Agamemnon*, *Troades*, and *Phoenissae*.

SERVIUS (fourth century AD), Roman scholar who is best remembered as the author of a commentary on the poems of *Vergil. The longer version of his commentary (known as *Servius auctus* or *Servius Danielis*) incorporates material from other authors. These and other ancient notes on Vergil's works contain valuable reports on Greek legend, preserving some stories that are recorded in no other source.

SIMONIDES (c. 556–468 BC), lyric poet. Far less of his poetry survives than is the case with his nephew Bacchylides and great successor Pindar, and little of what does survive has anything to do with myth. This is a shame because he seems to have had gifts of his own as a narrative poet who was capable of writing with great simplicity and pathos. These qualities are shown to the full in a wonderful little poem (543 PMG) in which Danae sings a sad lament to her sleeping baby Perseus as they are drifting through rough seas in a little chest (see p. 225). We have to rely in the main on scholiasts' reports for an idea of how Simonides recounted other myths.

SOPHOCLES (c. 496–406 BC), Athenian tragic poet, a contemporary of Euripides. The most widely familiar of his seven surviving plays are those that portray the sad fate of Oedipus and his daughter Antigone. In *Oedipus the King* (*Oidipous Tyrannos*), Sophocles shows how it finally came to be revealed that Oedipus had unknowingly killed his father and married his mother; and *Oedipus at Colonus*, a very late work, portrays the last hours of the blind and exiled king of Thebes, describing how he died in mysterious circumstances at Colonus (Kolonos) in Attica after arriving there with Antigone as his guide. Antigone herself is the heroine of *Antigone*, which tells how she provoked her own death by attending to the burial of her brother Polyneices in contravention of a decree of Creon, king of Thebes. Two of the other plays of Sophocles are set in the final period of the Trojan War, namely *Ajax*, which tells how the mighty warrior of that name came to commit suicide after being defeated in a contest for the arms of the dead Achilles (see p. 479), and the *Philoctetes*, which tells how the great archer of that name was finally recovered from the island of Lemnos after being marooned there by his comrades (see p. 465). *Women of Trachis* (*Trachiniai*) deals with the events that led up to the death of Heracles, while *Electra* portrays the predicament of Electra, daughter of Agamemnon, at Mycenae after the murder of her father. The action of the latter play is set at the time when Electra's brother Orestes returns to avenge the murder. Substantial remains of one of Sophocles' Satyr-plays, the *Trackers* (*Ichneutai*), have been recovered from papyri; it tells how Seilenos and his crew of cowardly Satyrs tracked down the infant Hermes after his theft of Apollo's cattle.

STATIUS (Publius Papinius Statius, c. 45–96 AD), Roman poet, author of the *Thebais*, a Theban epic in twelve books that tells the story of the conflict between the two sons of Oedipus. He also embarked on an epic account of the life of Achilles, the *Achilleis*, of which only two books were completed.

STEPHANUS of Byzantium (c. sixth century AD), author of a large geographical lexicon, the *Ethnica*, which contained information on mythological and historical matters. Although we possess very little of the original text, its contents are partially preserved in a surviving epitome.

STESICHORUS (first half of the sixth century BC), Greek Sicilian lyric poet. Although classed as an author of choral lyric, Stesichorus wrote long narrative poems that seem to have had more in common with epic than with conventional lyric poetry. Among the many mythical subjects that are known to have been treated by him are the hunt for the Calydonian boar, Heracles' theft of the cattle of Geryon (see p. 250, probably providing the basis for Apollodorus' account of that episode), Eriphyle's betrayal of her husband, the sack of Troy, and the revenge of Orestes; but although his poems apparently exerted a considerable influence on the development of the mythical tradition, almost nothing is preserved of them. Stesichorus himself became a subject of legend, as we will see (p. 456), for he was said to have written a poem of recantation to win back his eyesight after he had been blinded by Helen for insulting her in one of his poems.

STRABO (c. 64 BC–AD 19), historian and geographer, author of a surviving geographical treatise in seventeen books. The bulk of the work is a descriptive regional geography of the known world, compiled chiefly from secondary sources. Since Strabo is primarily interested in the world as a habitation for man and a setting for human activities and history, he quite often has occasion to refer to mythological matters in relation to the traditions and historical background of the areas that he surveys. His respect for Homer's authority encouraged him to include antiquarian material. A translation with a good index can be found in the Loeb series.

THEOCRITUS (active in the first half of the third century BC), a Hellenistic poet who is best remembered as the founder of the ancient genre of bucolic or pastoral poetry, although he was actually more versatile than this might suggest. His poems (apart from the epigrams) are traditionally known as *Idylls*, but it should not be inferred from this that all are idyllic in the modern sense since the term could originally be applied to poems that contained a wide range of subject-matter; one of the finest of Theocritus' idylls is a thus a portrayal of city life in which two chattering women set off from home to attend a festival of Adonis, while others are mythical narratives in miniature epic form. *Idyll* 13, *Hylas*, tells how Heracles' favourite of that name was snatched away by amorous spring-nymphs; *Idyll* 24, *Herakliskos* (*Little Heracles*), tells how the infant Heracles strangled two snakes that were sent against him by Hera; *Idyll* 22, *Hymn to the Dioscuri*, tells how Pollux confronted the brutal Amycos in a lethal boxing match (see p. 402), and then offers a rather unusual account of the conflict between the Dioscuri and the sons of Aphareus (see p. 450). From among the spurious poems in the Theocritean corpus, *Idyll* 25, *Heracles the Lion-killer*, is worthy of mention, and others too, genuine and spurious, are of mythological interest; *Idyll* 6, for instance, is a pastoral poem in which two shepherds sing of the love of Polyphemos and Galateia. We possess poems by two of Theocritus' successors, *Moschus and *Bion, and there is an anonymous poem of related type, *Megara*, in which the wife and mother of Heracles talk to one another of their sorrows. The poems of Theocritus are translated along with those of his successors in the volume in the Loeb series entitled *The Greek Bucolic Poets*, and other translations can be found elsewhere.

THEOGNIS (sixth century BC), elegiac poet of aristocratic temper; almost 1,400 lines of verse, evidently of varied origin, are preserved under his name, but only a handful are of mythological interest.

THUCYDIDES (died c. 400 BC), author of a history of the Peloponnesian War, which is the most impressive exercise in historical analysis to have been attempted by any ancient author. The work starts with a short account of the earlier history of Greece extending back into the period of legend ([Chapters 2–19](#) of the first book, known as the *archaiologia*).

TRYPHIODORUS (probably fifth century AD), author of the *Capture of Troy*, a short epic in 691 lines; translated in the Loeb series.

VALERIUS FLACCUS (writing in the latter part of the first century BC), Roman poet, author of an incomplete Argonautic epic, the *Argonautica*.

VATICAN MYTHOGRAPHERS, the name ascribed to the authors of three medieval collections of mythical tales that are preserved in a manuscript in the Vatican Library; the narratives are drawn from Latin scholia and late Latin sources. French translations are available or in the course of preparation.

VERGIL (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70–19 BC), Roman poet, author of the *Eclogues*, a book of pastoral poems, the *Georgics*, a poem about farming and bee-keeping, and the *Aeneid*, an epic poem in twelve books that describes how the Trojan prince Aeneas (Aineias in Greek) wandered to Italy after the fall of Troy and established himself in Latium to become the ancestor of the founder of Rome (see pp. 528ff.). Vergil often refers to persons or stories from Greek legend, borrows from Greek legend, or adapts it to suit his own purposes; and the surviving commentaries on his works by *Servius and other scholars often refer to such matters as a consequence, and so can be a valuable source for the mythologist.

XENOPHON (c. 430–354 BC), historian and author of prose treatises, mainly on practical subjects; he rarely has occasion to refer to matters of mythological concern.

2

First beginnings and the Age of the Titans

Although conflicting accounts inevitably came to be offered of the origins of the gods and of the physical universe, Hesiod's *Theogony*, an epic history of the divine order composed in about 700 BC (see p. 8), won general acceptance among the Greeks as the standard mythical account of the earliest history of the world, and we will adopt it as our main guide in the first section of this book, as we examine how the world and the lesser and higher deities were supposed to have come into existence in due succession, and how Zeus and the Olympian gods finally attained supreme authority.

Before considering Hesiod's cosmogony, it may be useful to try to imagine how the world was visualized by the Greeks in early times. As viewed from their perspective, as people who lived on the edge of a land mass, it might naturally have appeared to take the form of a circular disc, more or less level except where hills or mountains rose up from it, capped by the immense roof or dome of the sky. On the one side the sun and stars could be seen rising above the horizon, while on the other they disappeared at their setting; and since they always rose on the same side, in the east, they must presumably have made their way back again, either under the ground or by some other hidden route. It was imagined that the outermost boundary of this disc of the earth was formed by the stream of Ocean (Oceanos), which was not an ocean in the modern sense but a great river flowing in a circle around the edges of the earth. The sky was envisioned as a substantial roof or, later, dome sometimes said to be made of bronze or iron, which rose to a considerable, though not immeasurable, height above the earth. Zeus and the higher gods could be imagined as residing in the sky itself, or else on the summit of Mt Olympos in north-eastern Greece, hence their familiar name of Olympian gods. If one could pile three large mountains one above another, as the gigantic Aloadae set out to do when they revolted against the gods (see p. 84), it would be sufficient to form a ladder to heaven. The tale of Phaethon's ascent in the chariot of the Sun (see pp. 42–3), to take but one example, implies that if one could travel far enough to the east, one would reach the place where the sky touches the earth and the sun-god begins his ascent. Far to the west on the other hand, where the sun goes down, there was a place of darkness, with an entrance to Hades located nearby, as we will see in connection with Odysseus' visit to the world of the dead (see p. 99). Hades was

pictured, of course, as a murky realm that lay somewhere far beneath the earth and might thus also be reached through one of the many deep chasms or sinkholes in the Greek rocks, known in the modern language as *katavóthra*, most especially the famous one at Tainaron in the southern Peloponnese. This is amply witnessed in the myths of Orpheus, Heracles, and other heroes who were said to have ventured into Hades by such routes while still alive. Even further down, below Hades, there was thought to be another dark region called Tartaros, which formed the lowermost part of the world and could serve as a prison for banished gods; as time progressed, however, Tartaros came to be regarded as being no more than a subregion of Hades. Such was the earliest Greek picture of the world, presupposed by the earliest myths and surviving with varying degrees of change into those of later origin.

First beginnings

Having this general notion of the world in which they lived, the Greeks were interested from quite early times in the question of how it came into being, and it is natural that Hesiod's theogony, or account of the origins and successive generations of the gods, should start with a cosmogony, to explain how the universe that the gods now inhabited and ruled came to acquire its present form. The first things that came into being, so the poet relates, were the four primal entities, Chaos, Earth, Tartaros, and Eros.

The four primal realities

First of all, so Hesiod tells us, came CHAOS.¹ This word, which carries no connotation of disorder or confusion in early usage, seems literally to mean 'gaping void'. It signifies something more than mere empty space, however, since Chaos is a primal feature of the universe, a murky reality that will be represented in the forthcoming genealogies as the source of much that is dark and negative in the world. It is worth noting that Hesiod imagines it as something that is solid enough to be affected by the heat of Zeus's thunderbolt.² When the universe is fully constructed, it will come to be situated between Earth and the lowest region of all, Tartaros.³ Although *chaos* is a neuter noun in Greek, Chaos is treated as female in so far as it is personified as a deity.

If Chaos comes first, she is followed by three other entities, first broad-bosomed **Gaia** or **Earth**, the ever-sure seat of the gods, and then gloomy **Tartaros** in a recess of the broad-pathed earth, and finally **Eros**, the personification of love or, perhaps more accurately, of desire.⁴ Although it is quite often assumed that all three are born out of Chaos as her offspring, this is not stated by Hesiod nor even implied by him, since the emergence of Chaos and her three successors alike is described in a single sentence governed by the same verb *geneto* ('came to be'). Earth, Tartaros, and Eros are thus best regarded as being primal realities like Chaos, which came into existence independently of her. Chaos will found a distinctive family of her own, as we will see, through two children of hers who are explicitly stated to have been born *from* her.⁵

Of these four primal entities, two alone will be of genealogical significance, Chaos and, above all, Earth. EROS is introduced at this early stage because he is the motor that will drive the process of mating and procreation that will bring everything else into being. As a mythical agent, he could be pictured in a variety of ways, whether as an ancient and all-powerful cosmic force as in the present context,⁶ or as a potent force of nature who inspires all living beings with procreative desire, or as a mischievous boy-god (or even child-god) who pricks gods and mortals with his arrows to inflame them with desire. Broadly speaking, he grows younger and more frivolous as time progresses; he will be considered further in his nature as a god of love when we come to deal with Aphrodite (see p. 181).

It is harder to say why Hesiod should have included TARTAROS among these first entities. He may perhaps have done so because Tartaros is set so much apart from everything else in the world; for it will be the nethermost region of the completed universe, lying far beneath the earth (or in its very deepest recesses), at a lower level even than Hades. It is stated in a subsequent passage in the *Theogony* that Tartaros lies as far beneath the earth as heaven rises above the earth, and that a bronze anvil cast down from the earth would fall down for nine days and nights before reaching Tartaros on the tenth.⁷ Or, according to a comparable but somewhat different reckoning in the *Iliad*, Tartaros lies as far beneath Hades as heaven rises above the earth.⁸ As originally conceived, Tartaros served as a remote and secure prison for banished deities, and was wholly separate from Hades, which was a home for dead mortals. In the course of time, however, the distinction became increasingly blurred, and authors from Plato onwards regularly use Tartaros as a convenient name for the region of Hades in which the undeserving dead suffer posthumous punishment (see p. 108).⁹ The personified Tartaros was occasionally named as a father of sinister children, such as Typhon in the *Theogony*, or Echidna and Thanatos (Death) in later sources.¹⁰

The origin of night and day, and the self-generated offspring of Earth

The next stage in the development of the universe commenced when Chaos and Gaia proceeded to generate further children from themselves without contact with any male partner. In the first place, Chaos brought forth a son and daughter in this way, EREBOS and black NIGHT (or NYX in Greek).¹¹ Erebos can be seen as a fitting brother for Night in so far as he is a personification of darkness, especially that of the gloomy Underworld, which forms a separate realm of darkness. He was barely regarded as a personal being, however, and from the Homeric epics onwards the word Erebos was generally employed merely as a poetic synonym for the Underworld, when the author had occasion to speak of people descending to the darkness down below or being sent to it.

Night for her part was a highly respected but rather vague figure in Greek myth. A tale in the *Iliad* seems to suggest that even Zeus held her in awe, for when Sleep (Hypnos) once sought refuge with her to escape the fury of Zeus (see p. 58), he let him go, angry though he was, 'for he shrank from doing anything that would displease swift-passing Night'.¹² If Hesiod could call her deadly (*oloē*)¹³ with her

noxious progeny in mind, she could also be regarded as kind because she brings release from the cares of the day, much like her son Sleep.¹⁴ She could be pictured as an umbrageous goddess who flutters through the air on dark wings or perhaps rides through it in a chariot. In myth, she is above all a cosmogonical deity, making no appearance in mythical tales except in the above-mentioned story from the *Iliad* (and also an unusual version of the myth of Zeus's courtship of Thetis, in which Night rather than Themis, see p. 429, is said to have warned him not to marry that goddess).¹⁵ She was credited with prophetic powers as the latter tale would indicate, and had some connection with oracles; Pausanias mentions that there was an oracle of Night at Megara.¹⁶

Although Night subsequently went on to generate a whole series of dismal children from herself, we are concerned at present with the two children alone, whom she bore to Erebos by natural process, namely AITHER and DAY (HEMERA in Greek).¹⁷ In so far as Day was pictured at all as a goddess, she was generally identified with Eos (Dawn) in the subsequent tradition, a goddess of greater imaginative appeal who brought the light of day. Aither for his part represented the bright upper sky and could thus be seen as the direct opposite of Erebos, who represented the subterranean darkness. Although it may seem odd at first sight that these two radiant children should be born to forces of darkness, it is really quite logical if one keeps two points in mind, that night and day, and the darkness and light associated with them, are interrelated opposites that succeed one another, and that brightness was bound to emerge from darkness rather than vice versa because the emergence of light and day marks a positive advance in the development of the universe. It may be remarked that the first stages of the Hebrew creation myth in *Genesis* follow much the same pattern, for after the initial state of things in which the earth is without form and darkness is on the waters, light is brought into being next, and thus night and day, before greater order is introduced into the material universe.¹⁸ By contrast to his sister Night, Erebos exhausts his function in bringing daylight into being, and nothing more will be heard of him.

After night and day had been brought into being in this way, Earth completed the development of the basic structure of the world by generating offspring from herself as Chaos had done. As the first and greatest of her self-generated offspring, she brought forth 'Starry OURANOS (or SKY), equal to herself, to cover her over on every side', and she then separated out two main features of her own topography by bringing forth the Mountains (Ourea) and 'the barren sea with its seething billows', as personified in PONTOS or SEA.¹⁹ We are reminded again of *Genesis*, in which the sky and sea are separated out after the creation of light.²⁰ It should be noted, however, that Hesiod was not greatly interested in these cosmological matters and is extremely summary in his treatment of them, being eager to proceed to his main concern, the origin of the gods.

Alternative accounts of the first beginnings

As was noted above, there were other mythical cosmogonies that followed a different pattern from that of Hesiod. Night (Nyx) was elevated to a higher position in some,

figuring as the first being of all in one Orphic cosmogony, and as a member of the first couple with Tartaros or Aer in schemes from apocryphal writings ascribed to Mousaios and Epimenides respectively.²¹ The *Iliad* refers, by contrast, to an ancient tradition in which the first couple were Oceanos and Tethys, two deities of the waters (see further on pp. 28 and 38f.). Some of the most interesting and elaborate schemes are those preserved in the Orphic literature, that is to say, in apocryphal writings ascribed to the legendary singer Orpheus (see p. 565) that circulated from the late archaic period onwards. A characteristic feature of these cosmogonies was the world-egg from which a demiurge or creator-god – who was given various names such as Phanes, Protogonos, or Eros – was supposed to have sprung. According to one scheme, Chronos, un-ageing Time, existed first of all and gave birth to Aither, Chaos, and Erebus; and Chaos created an egg from Aither, from which Phanes or Protogonos emerged, a bisexual being who then mated with himself to set the course of creation in train.²² Aristophanes refers to the world-egg in one of his comedies, the *Birds*, in which he offers a gentle parody of an Orphic cosmogony: Chaos, Night, Erebus, and Tartaros existed first of all, so we are told, when there was neither earth, nor air, nor sky, and in the bosom of Erebus, black-winged Night then brought forth a wind-egg from which golden-winged Eros (the demiurge) came to emerge.²³

The rationalistic cosmogonies that were developed by the early philosophers from the sixth century BC onwards marked a new departure, but not an absolute break, since they would not have taken the form that they did if it had not been for the influence of early myth and mythical patterns of thought. Starting from an undifferentiated *archē*, or first principle, for instance water or air, such schemes set out to explain in purely rational terms how the various elements (aither, air, fire, water, earth) separated out and then how the fully differentiated universe came to be formed from these elements.²⁴ Features of the traditional Hesiodic cosmogony were sometimes reinterpreted in the light of such speculations in the later tradition. A good example of this can be found in the cosmogony at the beginning of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Chaos comes to be represented as a formless mixture of the elements or principles of matter, hot and cold, soft and hard, heavy and light. After this initial disorder is resolved, by some god or some process of nature, the different elements separate out and come to predominate at different levels in the universe, fiery aither in the vault of heaven, and air below it, and earth at the lowest level of all, embraced by the waters of the sea.²⁵

The three great divine families, one descended from Night and two from Earth

To return to Hesiod's *Theogony*, all the deities and divine forces that are subsequently born into the world will be descended either from Chaos or from Earth. If Chaos will become the ancestor of all manner of negative and baneful forces through children who are brought forth by her daughter Night, Earth will found her two different families in another way, by mating with her two self-generated sons, Ouranos, or Sky as we may call him henceforth, and Pontos or Sea. She will enter into a proper marriage with Sky to found her main family, which will account for the origin of all

the most important gods and most of the higher ones, but will also found another family through children conceived to Sea, consisting mainly of sea-beings and of monsters who could not be fittingly included in her other family. By contrast to Chaos, Earth will thus be the progenitor of all that is venerable and positive in the world, even if some unappealing monsters will also be included among her descendants.

Although all the supreme deities will be descended from Earth and Sky, as members of the more exalted of Earth's two families, the deities who will finally preside over the world, that is to say Zeus and the Olympian deities, will not be brought to birth as the immediate offspring of Earth and Sky. For the main children of the marriage, known collectively as the Titans, will form an initial ruling order after the mightiest of them, Cronos, has established himself as the supreme god by mutilating and displacing his father Sky; and the final ruling order will subsequently be established in the third generation, when Zeus rises up against his father Cronos and the other Titans with the support of his brothers and sisters. A central feature of the *Theogony* is thus a 'succession myth' which is recounted in four stages in different parts of the poem, the first two stages being separated by a long genealogical section that surveys the three great divine families mentioned above. As well as explaining how Cronos and the Titans rose to power, to then be succeeded by Zeus and the Olympian deities, this succession myth also includes an account of an unsuccessful revolt that was raised against Zeus and the Olympian deities by Typhon, the most fearsome of all monsters.

Even if Hesiod recounts the succession myth in four stages, it can be said to fall into two main parts in relation to the history of the divine ordering of the world. The first part begins with the marriage of Earth and Sky, and tells how the initial ruling order came to be established under the Titans when that marriage was brought to a violent end, while the second part tells how Zeus rose up against Cronos to take the lead in banishing him and the other Titans, and so establish the Olympian ruling order. The first of these two stages will be examined in the rest of this chapter, along with all the mythology of Cronos and the Titans, and the second stage in [Chapter 4](#), which deals with the rise of Zeus and origin of the Olympian order. The intervening chapter will be devoted to the three great divine families mentioned above, as described in Hesiod's genealogical scheme.

The marriage of Earth and Sky

The Greek succession myth

Of the two partners of Earth, Sky alone can be regarded as having been a true husband of hers, since she is linked to Sea, who has no myths and is barely personified, for genealogical purposes alone. Earth and Sky are in fact the primordial couple in Hesiod's account of the earliest history of the world, even if they are not the first beings of all or the ancestors of all subsequent divine beings; and the first proper myth in that history is the one that tells how Sky provoked the dissolution of

his marriage and his own downfall by his mistreatment of his wife and children. Important though he may have been at this early stage, Sky makes no further appearance in standard myth after the end of his union with Earth, except in so far as he is said to have delivered prophecies to children of his in conjunction with Earth. There is no evidence that he was ever worshipped or that he played any part in Greek cult; at most, he might be invoked along with other deities in oaths.²⁶

By contrast to her male partners, the earth-goddess (Gaia or Ge) was worshipped to some extent in classical times, even if not as a deity of any great significance. Shrines are recorded for her in various parts of Greece, including one on the south slope of the Athenian acropolis, where she was honoured as Ge Courotrophos (Rearer of Children), and a joint temple that she shared with Zeus Agoraios in Sparta.²⁷ She had no festivals, however, and seems to have been honoured most frequently in conjunction with other deities. The Greeks liked to invoke her in oaths for much the same reason that they would invoke the sun-god Helios (see p. 41), and indeed Sky, because no one could break an oath in any part of the world without her being aware of it; in a scene in the *Iliad*, two lambs are fetched for sacrifice when a solemn oath is due to be sworn, a black female lamb for Gaia and a white male for Helios.²⁸ Although Earth acts as a personal being in her myths, and is sometimes shown in works of art rising up from the ground in human form (as when she delivers the earth-born Erichthonios to Athena, see p. 158), it cannot be said that she was really imagined as a fully anthropomorphic deity, since she remained too closely identified with the physical body that serves a home for human beings and other living things. In a Homeric Hymn that is addressed to her, she is praised accordingly as the mother of all (*pammētēr*), and as the eldest of all beings who nourishes all living creatures and brings prosperity to the human race through her harvests and the livestock that she supports.²⁹

As the next event in the history of the universe after Earth brought forth her self-generated children, she lay with her son Sky and bore three sets of children to him, first a group of primordial gods who were known as the **Titans** (properly Titanes in Greek), and then two sets of monsters, the one-eyed **Cyclopes** and some hundred-armed giants who came to be known as the Hecatoncheires or **Hundred-Handers**. Sky hated them all, however, and hid them away at birth in the recesses of Earth to prevent them from coming into the light and rejoiced in his wrongdoing. Although Hesiod is vague about the cause of his hatred, it would seem that he took a dislike to them because they were terrible to behold, the last-born monsters being the worst of all. He apparently blocked their emergence by engaging in constant intercourse with his consort, although Hesiod is vague on that matter too.³⁰

Earth groaned under the strain and was impelled to devise a cunning plan in response. After first creating 'adamant', a mythical metal of extreme hardness, she fashioned a large jagged sickle, and tried to persuade her children to remedy their predicament, and her own, by using it against their father; but none had the courage to do so, apart from Cronos alone, the youngest and most fearsome of the Titans, who accepted the sickle and laid an ambush for Sky in accordance with his mother's plan. So as Sky was engaging in intercourse with Earth at nightfall, Cronos severed his genitals with the sickle and hurled them into the sea. Some sea-foam gathered

around them there to generate the goddess Aphrodite, and many drops of blood dripped down from them on to Earth, causing her to conceive three further sets of children, the Erinyes, Giants, and Meliai.³¹

The mutilation of Sky caused Earth and Sky to become separated from one another and brought their marriage to an end. This aspect of the story has obvious cosmological implications, although Hesiod is not interested in them, having little concern in general for such matters. Since the sky now rises high above the earth, it is suggested in the myths of many cultures that Earth and Sky, as the first couple, or at least a primordial couple, must somehow have been drawn apart at a very early stage in the history of the world, something that is often achieved in a gentler fashion than in the present myth. In an ancient Egyptian myth, for instance, Shu, the personification of the air, is said to have interposed himself between the earth-god Geb and the sky-goddess Nut to raise the latter's body high over that of her partner. Or, in Maori myth from far away in New Zealand, the union between the first couple Rangi and Papa, the female Earth and male Sky, became the first source of life, but all that they brought forth initially remained imprisoned between them because they never relaxed from their embrace; so the first gods, who formed part of their offspring, consulted together and resolved that Tane, the god of forests and birds, should separate Rangi and Papa by using his body to hold them apart; and when he did so, light appeared in the world for the first time.³² Closer to home in the ancient Near East, the Hurro-Hittite myth of Ullikummi referred to the sundering of the earth and sky; and the upward flight of Anu in the Hurro-Hittite succession myth summarized below (see p. 29–30) implies the same. Hesiod makes no reference, however, to the raising up of the sky, and he may not even have been aware of the point, since his interest was focused on the dynastic implications of the conflict that arose within the divine family.

As a result of Earth's scheme, which had now been successfully implemented by Cronos, the Titans were finally able to emerge into the light, and Cronos displaced his father as the supreme god, establishing himself as lord of the universe with his fellow Titans as subordinate members of the new ruling order. Although one might have assumed that the monstrous offspring of Earth and Sky, the Cyclopes and Hundred-Handers, would have been released at the same time as their brothers and sisters, they seem to have remained imprisoned beneath the earth in this Hesiodic version of the succession myth (by contrast to that recorded by Apollodorus, see p. 68) until Zeus finally set them free for his own purposes.

The divine ruling order that was now established would not be the final ruling order, as already mentioned, because Cronos mistreated his children as grievously as his father had, and he was thus destined to be displaced in his turn. He had some motive for acting in that way beyond mere malice, for he had been warned by Earth and Sky that he was fated to be overthrown by his own son, and so he swallowed his children at birth to try to forestall that danger. His plan was foiled, however, because his wife Rhea hid his youngest son, giving him a stone to swallow instead, and that son, Zeus, grew to cause his downfall just as had been foretold, by forcing him to disgorge his other children, and then banding together with them to depose him, banishing him and his fellow Titans to Tartaros, something that would require the

most fearsome of all wars to achieve.³³ These next stages of the succession myth will be examined in further detail in the next chapter, when we come to deal with the rise of Zeus and the origin of the Olympian order.

The Cyclopes and Hundred-Handers, the monstrous offspring of the marriage

After giving birth to the Titans, Earth bore two sets of monsters to Sky as the final children of their marriage, the **Cyclopes** and the **Hecatoncheires** or **Hundred-Handers**. Although it may seem surprising that beings of such a kind should have been born into this foremost divine family from which the highest deities would spring, these monsters differ from those in the family of Earth and Sea (see p. 53ff.) in so far as they are introduced to play a positive role in the succession myth, by helping Zeus to rise to power, rather than to serve a function in the ordering of the world or to become fearsome opponents for heroes of legend. For if formidable deities like the Titans were to be defeated, that could be achieved only with the help of formidable monsters, who could support Zeus in battle and arm him with overwhelmingly powerful weaponry.

The three CYCLOPES (Round-eyes), who were gigantic beings with a single eye in the middle of their forehead, would assist Zeus in the latter regard, not by becoming directly involved in the fighting but by providing him with his thunder-weapon. Their connection with thunder and lightning as the manufacturers of the thunderbolt is reflected in the names that Hesiod assigns to them, Brontes (Thunder-man), Steropes (Lightning-man), and Arges (Vividly bright; an epithet applied to Zeus's thunderbolt in early epic).³⁴ According to Apollodorus, they also provided Hades with a helmet (i.e. of invisibility) and Poseidon with his trident, which also served as a powerful weapon. There is otherwise an astral myth of Hellenistic origin in which they are said to have fashioned the altar on which Zeus and the other gods of his generation swore their alliance before making war against the Titans; after their victory, they placed it in the sky as the southern constellation of the Altar (Ara).³⁵

In the latter part of the *Theogony* the Cyclopes fall from sight as the Hundred-Handers come to the fore, as the monsters who provided direct assistance to Zeus in his war against the Titans. It could be assumed that they continued to forge thunderbolts for Zeus after he rose to power, since his possession of that weapon helped him to maintain his dominant position; but there was also a quite early tradition, recorded in a fragment from Pindar, that suggested that he killed the Cyclopes to prevent them from being able to provide anyone else with such a powerful weapon.³⁶ According to a more widely known story, Apollo eventually killed them because they had made the thunderbolt that Zeus had used to kill his son Asclepios,³⁷ see further on p. 145. Both of these latter myths seem rather odd, however, since one might have supposed that beings of such high birth would have been immortal by nature. Since they must evidently have been skilled craftsmen who possessed great strength, it came to be imagined in Hellenistic and later times that they assisted the divine blacksmith Hephaistos in his labours, toiling at his side in a huge forge under Mt Etna or elsewhere (see p. 179).³⁸ Pausanias reports that

sacrifices were offered to the Cyclopes at an ancient altar at the Isthmus of Corinth,³⁹ but there is no indication otherwise that they were honoured in cult.

As was remarked by ancient mythographers, these primordial Cyclopes should be distinguished from mythical giants of two other kinds who were called by the same name, the Homeric Cyclopes and the master-builders of popular lore. The Cyclopes of the *Odyssey* lived a primitive pastoral life without government or law on a mythical island somewhere in the westernmost reaches of the sea. If all of them were like Polyphemos, the ogre who captured Odysseus (see p. 506), they were savage sons of Poseidon who had only a single eye.⁴⁰ As for the other race of Cyclopes, they were giants of folklore who were credited with having built the mighty walls of Mycenae and Tiryns, and other Mycenaean structures whose ‘Cyclopean’ masonry seemed to lie beyond the capacity of ordinary human workmanship.⁴¹ They may be compared with the giants who are invoked in modern folklore to explain how megalithic monuments like Stonehenge came to be erected.

The second group of monstrous sons of Earth and Sky consisted of three gigantic beings who each had fifty heads and a hundred arms; although Hesiod refers to them by their individual names alone, Cottos, Briareos, and Gyges, mythographers in later times devised a convenient name for them, calling them the HECATONCHEIRES or HUNDRED-HANDERS⁴² (the corresponding adjective is already applied to Briareos in the *Iliad* 43). As hundred-handed giants of irresistible strength, they would be invaluable allies for Zeus in the struggle against the Titans (see p. 67). Since these monsters, or two of them at any rate, were sent down to Tartaros afterwards by Zeus to perform the further service of guarding the defeated Titans, they make no further appearance in myth, at least as a group.

One of the brothers, BRIAREOS (the Mighty One, also called Ombriareos), has independent stories nonetheless which are set during the period of Olympian rule, for although it is initially suggested in the *Theogony* that all three of the brothers were sent away to guard the Titans, it is stated in a later part of the poem that this was true of Cottos and Gyes alone, since Briareos, ‘being noble (*eun*)’, became a son-in-law of Poseidon, who offered him his daughter Cymopoleia (Wave-walker, otherwise unknown) as a wife.⁴⁴ This would suggest that Briareos had connections with the sea, as might also be inferred from a story that is mentioned in passing in the *Iliad*, in which he is summoned up to Olympos by the sea-nymph Thetis to save Zeus from a threatened revolt by Hera, Poseidon, and Athena⁴⁵ (see p. 77). Homer remarks in that connection that he was called Briareos by the gods but was known to mortals as Aigaion, explaining his divine name by saying that he was even stronger than his father⁴⁶ (presumably to be envisioned here as Poseidon, in accordance with a tradition reported in the scholia). In a lost early epic, the *Titanomachy*, Aigaion was apparently said to have been a son of Earth and Sea who lived in the sea and fought as an ally of the Titans.⁴⁷ If this Aigaion can be identified as Briareos, as is suggested in the *Iliad*, this account of his role in the conflict between the younger gods and the Titans stands in direct conflict with that offered in the *Theogony*. According to a quite early story recounted by Pindar, Briareos acted as arbitrator when Helios and Poseidon competed for possession of Corinth in the very earliest times⁴⁸ (see p. 129). Cults are reported for this being under both names on the island of Euboea, as

Briareos at Carystos and as Aigaion at Chalcis.⁴⁹ It would appear from these scraps that quite a variety of myths and traditions grew up around this intriguing figure, and one would like to know more. Hesiod was perhaps not making one of his better choices when he enlisted him among the Hundred-Handers.

The children who were conceived by Earth as a result of the mutilation of Sky

In addition to the children whom she conceived to Sky as offspring of their marriage, Earth subsequently conceived some further children to him in less conventional circumstances, as a result of Zeus's action in severing his genitals. For Hesiod reports that when Zeus cut them off, some blood gushed forth from them and fell on the earth, causing Earth to become pregnant with three more sets of children, the **Erinyes**, the **Giants**, and the **Meliai**.

The GIANTS (Gigantes in Greek) were a race of mighty warriors, rather more than human and rather less than divine. They will be discussed further in the next chapter in connection with their revolt against Zeus and the Olympian order (see pp. 81ff.). Although Hesiod presents them as being martial beings who are clad in gleaming armour and hold long spears,⁵⁰ there is no indication that he knew of their revolt against the gods, and the story may well have been developed after his time; although there is a phrase that perhaps alludes to it toward the end of the *Theogony*, it comes in a part of the poem that was almost certainly added later.⁵¹ It seems likely that the Giants had always been regarded as earth-born, as their Greek name would suggest, and since they were superhuman beings who fell between gods and mortals, it could be fittingly added that the fertilizing power of the divine blood of Sky had caused the earth to bring them forth, a detail that was probably added by Hesiod himself in the present context. It is worth remarking that their English name carries misleading connotations, for although they were evidently regarded as being very large and powerful, the possession of prodigious size was not their defining characteristic.

Their sisters the MELIAI were a race of tree-nymphs.⁵² Although their name implies that they were nymphs of ash trees, it seems likely that Hesiod was using this as a name for tree-nymphs in general, because he offers no separate account of the origin of other tree-nymphs. In their different way, these nymphs resemble the Giants in being more than human and less than divine. As one of the most important forms of nymphs, who make some appearance in mythical tales, they will be considered along with all the other nymphs in [Chapter 6](#).

The remaining set of children, the ERINYES or FURIES, are the only ones that will require any detailed examination here. They were avenging spirits who exacted terrible but just retribution against people who committed murder and other grave crimes, especially within the family. Since Hesiod says nothing at all about their activities, we must turn to Homer to gain an idea of the kinds of offence that they were thought to punish in the early tradition. The *Iliad* tells how Amyntor cursed his son Phoinix to the Erinyes for having seduced his concubine (see p. 432); and when Althaia cursed her son Meleager for having killed some brothers of hers, 'the Erinys

who walks in darkness and is pitiless of heart heard her from Erebos'.⁵³ Or, in the *Odyssey*, Telemachos suggests that his mother Penelope might curse him to the Erinyes if he should send her away, and Odysseus remarks that Oedipus has been sorely troubled by the Erinyes of his mother since she hanged herself⁵⁴ (after discovering that her husband Oedipus was also her son, see p. 345). In a fragment from another early epic, the *Thebais*, the Erinyes is said to have paid due heed to Oedipus when he cursed his sons⁵⁵ (see p. 352). These sources and others of the kind indicate that the Erinyes were thought to take a special interest in offences committed by one member of a family against another (especially younger against older, child against parent), and were often spurred into action by a curse from the injured party. It is therefore fitting that Hesiod should present them as having been born as a consequence of an offence that had been committed by a son against his father.

Other allusions in the Homeric epics show that the Erinyes also had broader concerns. Homer remarks in the first place that anyone who swears a false oath will be punished by the Erinyes in the world below;⁵⁶ and Hesiod alludes to this function in figurative terms in the *Works and Days* when he says that the Erinyes assisted at the birth of Horcos (Oath; see p. 61).⁵⁷ They became the main agents of retribution in the Underworld in the late tradition, punishing the dead for sins of any kind. It is remarked in the *Odyssey*, though as a mere possibility, that even beggars may have their Erinyes⁵⁸ (for they have no one else to avenge them). Most interesting of all, however, is a passage in the *Iliad* that suggests that they may act to uphold the proper order of things even where no human offence is involved; for after Xanthos, one of the divine chariot-horses of Achilles, had spoken aloud to address a prophecy to his master, the Erinyes cut off his voice,⁵⁹ plainly because it is unnatural for horses to speak. The aphoristic philosopher Heraclitus (mid-sixth century BC) writes correspondingly – though obviously in a more figurative vein – that ‘the Sun will not overstep his measures, for if he does, the Erinyes, ministers of justice, will seek him out’.⁶⁰

Their most celebrated stories in heroic mythology relate nonetheless to offences within the family, telling how they punished two Argive heroes, Orestes and Alcmaion, for having killed their mothers (see pp. 516 and 363f). Although both young men took this drastic action to avenge the deaths of their fathers, and even gained the consent of Apollo at Delphi beforehand, the Erinyes knew no pity in such cases, and took no account of mitigating circumstances; the deed was their sole concern. They thus embody early ideas of justice from a time before it came to be appreciated that animus is a necessary part of every crime, and that a deed committed through mere accident or as a result of external compulsion does not carry with it the full moral or legal responsibility of a deliberate act. Yet even so, they are a long way from representing the most primitive stages of moral consciousness, for they punish, not families or clans, but solely the individual who commits the deed. They may, however, be said to represent the moral ideas of the clan, for they are regularly on the side of the elders, not only of fathers or mothers but also of elder brothers.

They are represented in art and literature as fearsome beings of stern appearance,

who carry torches and scourges, and are generally wreathed with serpents, or have serpents in their hair or carry them in their hands. They were presented in an especially loathsome form in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, as dark vampire-like creatures who crawled around on all fours, with pus oozing from their eyes and sinister rasping breath;⁶¹ it was said, indeed, that they were so horrifying at the first performance that some women in the audience suffered miscarriages. It is worth noting, however, as an indication of the distaste that the Greeks generally felt for all that is monstrously hideous, that the Erinyes were not represented in the visual arts as ugly or misshapen, but rather as beautiful though fierce-looking women who could be known for what they were by their expressions and the scourges and other implements that they carried.

The Erinyes have no individual names in the early tradition, and are of indeterminate number; it is not until the Roman period that the idea appears that there were three of them named Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaira.⁶² Aeschylus and some later authors depart from Hesiod by classing them as daughters of Night, as seems appropriate enough, while Sophocles describes them as daughters of Scotos (Darkness personified) and Earth.⁶³ They were equated with the Eumenides (Kindly Ones) and Semnai (Venerable Ones), goddesses of gentler aspect and more propitious name, who were honoured in cult at Athens and elsewhere. They had no equivalents in Roman belief, their Latin name, *Furiae*, being perhaps no more than an attempt at a translation (*furere*, to be raging mad, being taken as an equivalent to Greek *erineuein*).

Hesiod's account of the origin of Aphrodite

And finally, one of the great Olympian deities is presented by Hesiod as having been born in very early times as a result of the marriage of Earth and Sky, or at least of its violent end. For when the severed genitals of Sky fell into the sea, white sea-foam (*aphros*) gathered around them, and the goddess APHRODITE grew up from it. After first drifting past the island of Cythera off the south-east corner of the Peloponnese, hence her title of Cythereia (probably not originally connected with the island, although Cythera was noted for its ancient cult of Aphrodite, see p. 180), she stepped ashore at Cyprus, which was the most important centre of her cult.⁶⁴ Hesiod thus portrays her as having been the first-born Olympian deity, who entered the world at much the same time as the Titans, doubtless because she represents a primal force that must have been at work almost from the beginning, not least in the burgeoning of these divine families; it will be remembered that Eros, who now becomes an attendant of Aphrodite,⁶⁵ was one of the four primal entities. This remained the most favoured account of Aphrodite's birth, although it conflicts with another recorded by Homer, apparently of even earlier origin, that describes her as having been borne to Zeus by the goddess Dione,⁶⁶ see further on p. 74–5.

Cronos and the Titans

The twelve deities who are classed by Hesiod as Titans

It is obvious from a casual glance that the deities in Hesiod's list of Titans are of such disparate nature and origin that they could not possibly have formed a common group from very early times. Some have Greek names, others foreign names; some are nature-gods, some are abstractions, some are nonentities who were probably never anything more than genealogical links. Some of them, moreover, for reasons that will be considered presently, could not have shared the common fate of the Titans as former gods who were banished forever. It is altogether probable that the Titans, with the possible exception of Cronos, were originally an anonymous collective body, and one may suspect that most of the deities in the standard list, as established in the *Theogony*, were first named as Titans by Hesiod himself (who may well have been responsible too for first establishing that they were specifically twelve in number). It was essential that he should provide them with a full set of names if he was to draw them into his genealogical system; and he liked to assign appropriate names to members of groups of deities in any case, even to the many Nereids and Ocean-nymphs. So before passing on to consider them in their collective nature as a group, we must examine the nature of the deities, six male and six female, who are enlisted as Titans in the *Theogony*,⁶⁷ and consider why Hesiod should have selected them for that role, in so far as it can be assumed that he was responsible for doing so.

There is good reason to suppose that three of the deities in Hesiod's list – Cronos and Rhea of course, and also Iapetos – would already have been regarded as Titans at the time at which he was writing. The formulaic epithets Cronios and Cronides that are regularly applied to Zeus in the Homeric epics indicate clearly enough that Cronos had been viewed as the father of Zeus from very ancient times; and since such epithets are not applied to any other deity, Zeus may perhaps have been his only child in the original tradition. It seems likely that **Cronos** was first brought into the succession myth, and so enlisted as a Titan, because he was the acknowledged father of Zeus in the native tradition. His consort **Rhea** is also assigned a central role in the succession myth, as the 'mother of the gods' (i.e. of the first generation of Olympian gods), and by virtue of the crucial part that she plays in saving Zeus from being swallowed by Cronos. She is named as a Titan in the *Theogony*, and had presumably long been identified as such, unless the Titans were once thought to be exclusively male. Since **Iapetos** (the father of Atlas and Prometheus, see p. 46) is mentioned along with Cronos in the *Iliad* as a god imprisoned in Tartaros,⁶⁸ it would seem that he had come to be classed as a Titan by the time of Homer and Hesiod, perhaps because he was a father of children who were enemies of Zeus. There is no evidence to suggest, however, that any of the other nine Titans in the list had already come to be regarded as such.

Oceanos was the god of the outer Ocean, the great river that supposedly encircled the earth and was the source of all other waters, salt and sweet alike.⁶⁹ It could naturally be assumed that the lord of these waters must have been a very ancient deity, who would have been at his post from the very earliest times. In the *Iliad* he and his consort **Tethys** are said to have been the first couple from whom all

the gods had sprung,⁷⁰ an idea apparently derived from a Babylonian myth in which Apsu and Tiamat, representing the sweet and salt waters respectively, were portrayed as the first couple. Even if they could not be regarded in that way in the context of the succession myth, they could be fittingly placed among the Titans as venerable deities whose union could account for the origin of all the lesser streams in the world, and, by doing so, Hesiod accorded them only a slightly lower status than in the Homeric account. And yet, on the other hand, Oceanos seems ill-fitted to take part in the collective actions of the Titans and share their common fate, since his waters are a permanent feature of the world, and one might suppose that he would be obliged to remain in them at the edges of the earth. So it might have been difficult for him to fight against Zeus and his allies, and he could certainly not have been banished to Tartaros afterwards. The story in the latter part of the *Theogony* in which he tells his daughter Styx to assist Zeus against the Titans (see p. 39) is consistent with the thought that he did not join with the other Titans in fighting against Zeus;⁷¹ and in the theogony recorded by Apollodorus, in which the Titans are presented as attacking Sky as a collective body, it is explicitly stated that Oceanos took no part in that enterprise.⁷² **Themis**, the personification of law and right order, and **Mnemosyne**, the personification of memory, could also be enlisted quite appropriately among the Titans in so far as they represent ancient and fundamental forces in the world; but, as in the case of Oceanos, it can hardly be imagined that they have been banished from the world since the fall of the Titans. Even in the *Theogony* itself (though in a part of the poem that was probably added after Hesiod's time), they reappear after the banishment of the Titans as early wives of Zeus.⁷³ Themis figures, furthermore, as we will see, in a number of myths set in the Olympian era.

The other Titans in Hesiod's list are obscure deities who are of genealogical significance alone; none have any recorded myths, and they may well have had no stories even in Hesiod's time, being remembered only as parents or ancestors of more important deities (if they were not invented by the poet himself, as is possible in one or two cases). **Hyperion** is mentioned in the Homeric epics and other early poetry as the father of the sun-god Helios; and his name is also used on occasion as a title of Helios himself.⁷⁴ Since the sun and other main luminaries of the sky must have come into existence at an early stage of the development of the world, Hyperion could be fittingly enlisted as their Titan father. **Coios** also finds a natural place among the Titans as the father of Leto, who was the mother of two major Olympian deities, Artemis and Apollo. Hyperion and Coios have Titan consorts assigned to them, **Theia**, 'the Divine', and **Phoibe**, 'the Radiant', respectively; it required no great ingenuity, whether on the part of Hesiod or some predecessor, to invent figures such as these. And finally there is **Creios** (or Crios), whose nature and origin are a mystery. As we will see, he served a useful if minor genealogical function by fathering husbands for some early goddesses. There was not always complete agreement on the identity of the Titans in the subsequent tradition; Apollodorus, for instance, omits Phoibe, replacing her with Dione⁷⁵ (the consort of Zeus at Dodona, and mother of Aphrodite in one account, see pp. 74–5).

The common nature of the Titans as the former ruling gods

Except in the case of Cronos and Rhea, the individual nature of the Titans in Hesiod's list reveals nothing about the common nature of the Titans in their mythical context. It should be apparent from the preceding summary of the succession myth that Cronos and Rhea are the only Titans who are accorded a distinctive role in it, while the others act solely as a collective body, in so far as they act at all. Indeed, in the *Theogony* the other Titans make no contribution whatever to the ousting of Sky, and, when it is suggested in subsequent sources that they assisted in the enterprise, they assist in some unspecified way as a group. They benefit, however, from Cronos' initiative by becoming the chief gods of the pre-Olympian order under his sovereignty. It is one of their number, Rhea, the consort of Cronos, who opens the way for the ending of that order, by saving her last-born child, Zeus, from being swallowed by her husband, and so enabling him to mount a revolt against her husband. The Titans support Cronos in the ensuing war, the Titanomachy (see p. 67), again without having any specific deeds ascribed to them as individuals, but are ultimately defeated and banished by the younger gods.

The nature of the Titans was a subject that naturally aroused much speculation among earlier scholars. Some were tempted to explain the myth of the great war between the Olympians and Titans in simple historical terms, by suggesting that the Titans were old pre-Hellenic gods who had been displaced by the Olympian gods of the Greeks after the Greeks arrived in their final homeland, in which case the myth could be interpreted as reflecting the struggle of belief that the suppression of the old religion had entailed. It was posited, moreover, that the old gods must have been nature-powers of a less advanced or a less moral nature than the Olympian gods, and suggestions were sometimes made about their precise character as such, but never on any firm foundation. The whole nature of the discussion changed, however, when it came to be realized that the Greek succession myth bears a marked resemblance to myths of a comparable nature from the ancient Near East. Although other eastern succession myths had been known at an earlier period, the crucial factor in this regard was the publication in 1946 of a Hurro-Hittite myth that provides a particularly close parallel to Hesiod's myth.⁷⁶

The Hurrians, an ancient people who lived in northern Syria and adjoining areas, were subjugated in the fourteenth century BC by the Hittites, who were much influenced by their culture and have transmitted some of their myths to us on cuneiform tablets. One such myth tells of the sequence of events that led to the accession of the Hurrian equivalent of Zeus. Anu (Sky), who corresponds to the Greek Ouranos, seized power by deposing an obscure predecessor, Alalu, and reigned for nine years until his cupbearer, Kumarbi, engaged him in battle and defeated him. As Anu was trying to escape into the heavens, Kumarbi dragged him down by his feet and bit off his genitals and swallowed them. As he was then rejoicing in his triumph, Anu warned him to think again, saying that his action had caused him to become impregnated with three terrible gods. Although Kumarbi immediately spat out the contents of his mouth, the Storm-god was already inside him, and eventually emerged from his body. The text is very defective from this point onwards, but it is

clear enough that the Storm-god, who was the main god of the Hurrians and Hittites, just as Zeus was the main god of the Greeks, finally displaced Kumarbi as ruler.⁷⁷ Hesiod's myth may also be compared with a very ancient Babylonian myth in the poem known as the *Enuma Elish*, and also with a Phoenician myth (of questionable status, but thought to be at least partially authentic) which is preserved in a Greek work of the early Roman period.⁷⁸ When the implications of these foreign parallels came to be appreciated, it came to be generally accepted that the Greek succession myth was not of native origin, but was based on a myth that had been introduced from the Near East.

If this was the case, a group of displaced earlier gods corresponding to the Titans must have been introduced as part of the imported myth. The Hurro-Hittite equivalents of the Titans were known as the former gods (Hesiod refers to the Titans or Cronos in corresponding terms on two occasions⁷⁹), while their Babylonian equivalents were known as the dead gods. If the question of the origin of the Titans is viewed from this perspective, two possibilities arise. There may have been an early group of native gods of that name who were identified with the former gods of the imported myth; or else the name Titan was simply a title that was applied by the Greeks to the gods of eastern origin. There is no way of telling which alternative is true, and it makes little practical difference in any case, since we know nothing whatever of the original nature of the Titans if they had once enjoyed a separate existence in Greece. The essential point is that the Titans, as they are known to us as a collective body from the time of Hesiod onwards, are precisely what they are presented as being in the succession myth of eastern origin, the former ruling gods who were banished from the upper world when the present divine order was established. This is their 'nature', and nothing is served by enquiring any further; they have no other stories or functions as a collective body in conventional myth, and they had no place in Greek cult. The etymology of their name is uncertain; there is some ancient evidence to suggest that it may have meant 'princes' or the like. Hesiod offers an ingenious but obviously factitious double etymology, stating that Sky conferred this title on them in reproach, 'for he said that they strained (*titainontes*) and insolently performed a dreadful deed, for which vengeance (*tisin*) came to them afterwards'.⁸⁰

The reign of Cronos as a golden age

Although there are no myths set during the period of Titan rule other than the central story of how Cronos provoked his own downfall by swallowing his children, the Greeks came to develop an imaginative picture of the age of Cronos that is far more favourable than might be expected from that grim story. The ancient Greeks did not usually share our modern faith in the virtues of progress but tended to think that the world must have been closer to the divine, and things thus more perfect, before the present harsh dispensation came into being. So the age of Cronos, lying as it did near the very beginning of the world, could easily be imagined as having been a golden age, not because Cronos was presented in myth as having been in any way benevolent, but because he had presided over a primordial divine order in which

conditions could be supposed to have been quite the opposite of those under which we now have to suffer. A tradition that is also to be found in Hesiod thus presents the reign of Cronos as a time of innocent happiness when mortals lived long and virtuous lives under his kindly rule. In this view, his mortal subjects lived lives of blissful ease, much like the inhabitants of the Isles of the Blessed (see p. 105), without toil or strife or need of law, owning all things in common and enjoying abundant fruits and crops that were brought forth by the earth of its own accord; and when they finally died, it was as though they were overcome by a gentle sleep.⁸¹ This was, in other words, a peasant's daydream of a lost age of happiness rooted in folklore, which was projected back into the remotest past. It hardly needs saying that in the normal picture of the earliest history of the world, as presented in Hesiod's *Theogony* or in the later tradition, human beings would not yet have come into existence at the time at which Cronos and the Titans held sway.

The preceding idea is to be found not in the *Theogony*, but in another context in Hesiod's other surviving poem, the *Works and Days*.⁸² For in that poem he presents a myth of progressive decline, evidently of his own devising, in which the fortunate people who lived under the rule of Cronos are presented as being the first of five successive races, four of which are named after metals of decreasing value, gold, silver, bronze, and iron. We belong to the fifth and worst race, that of iron. The gods created a golden race of mortals first of all, who lived an ideal life under Cronos in accordance with the idea described above; and when these first people came to die, as though falling asleep, without ever having suffered the ravages of age, they became beneficent spirits (*daimones*) who roam the earth delivering mortals from harm and watching over their deeds. The gods replaced them with a silver race that was inferior in both body and mind. The people of this race took a hundred years to reach maturity, remaining all the while at their mother's side, but lived only a brief and wretched life when they finally grew up, for they were foolish beings who were unable to refrain from wrongdoing and violence and failed to honour the immortal gods. Their impiety aroused the anger of Zeus, who eventually removed them from the earth to become blessed spirits in the Underworld.⁸³ Zeus then brought a bronze race into being, consisting of people who sprang from ash trees (*meliai*, which might also be interpreted as meaning ash-tree-nymphs). Their armour, their weapons, and even their houses, were made of bronze. Powerful, aggressive, and flinty-hearted, they devoted themselves to war and slaughter until they were all destroyed as a result of their own violence, and they passed to the dank house of Hades leaving no name behind.⁸⁴

Before passing on to the last of his 'metallic' races, to which he himself belongs, Hesiod interposes the 'god-like race of heroes' who fought with honour in the Theban and Trojan Wars, and showed themselves to be nobler and more just than their predecessors in the bronze race; since it was agreed that the great heroes of epic lived just before the beginning of ordinary human history, the poet evidently felt obliged to include them at this point and so interrupt his scheme of decline. Hesiod's text is ambiguous on the matter of their ultimate fate, failing to make clear whether all were transferred to the Isles of the Blessed, or else only a portion of them while others were consigned to Hades.⁸⁵ As to the present age, Hesiod regrets that

he was ever born into it, for the people of the race of iron have no respite from toil and sorrow by day, or from wasting away and perishing by night. Although not wholly bad, they will grow progressively worse until Zeus destroys them in their turn.⁸⁶ It should be noted that Hesiod does not refer to golden and other *ages*, even if modern authors often find it convenient to use these terms when referring to his myth; the 'golden age' is an expression of Latin origin (from *saeculum aureum*, an ambiguous phrase that can mean both golden race and golden age).

The development of this ideal picture of the age of Cronos, as an era of just and benevolent rule, affected another aspect of that deity's mythology, for it came to be suggested that he ruled over the Isles of the Blessed after his fall from power, rather than being imprisoned forever in Tartaros. This thought was evidently suggested by the fact that conditions on the islands, which were a home for the favoured dead (see p. 105), were imagined as being much the same as those that had prevailed during the age of Cronos. The idea arose at a quite early period, moreover, since Pindar already presents Cronos as presiding over the islands and their fortunate inhabitants, where he occupies the judgement seat with Rhadamanthys (a legendary Cretan lawgiver, see p. 301) as his assistant.⁸⁷ Verses that can be found in some texts of the *Works and Days*, evidently as a product of later interpolation, explain that Zeus released Cronos from his imprisonment to enable him to assume that function.⁸⁸ This did not entirely displace the earlier conception, however, that presented him as being subjected to everlasting imprisonment. Plutarch records a picturesque tale, for instance, in which he lies asleep forever in an island beyond Britain, as remote a corner of the world as one could imagine, with Briareos (see p. 24) as his guard and many daemons as his attendants and servants.⁸⁹ It is explained that this sleep has been devised as a mode of bondage for him, an idea that may be quite old since Aristotle is reported to have spoken of a dreaming Cronos.⁹⁰ In rationalistic accounts of a Euhemeristic nature, which represent Cronos and Zeus as early kings, Cronos is often said to have sought refuge in Italy after he was deposed, hiding from Zeus in Latium, hence its name (as though it were derived from the Latin word *latere*, to hide). Vergil alludes to this tradition in the *Aeneid*, saying that Saturnus (i.e. Cronos) had ruled at the future site of Rome during his exile, where he had unified the local people and ushered in a golden age.⁹¹

Further mythology of Cronos and Rhea

Cronos has already been considered in relation to the central part that he played in the succession myth. Although he was honoured to only a very limited extent in cult, he had a most interesting festival, the Cronia, which was celebrated at Athens and other Ionian cities in particular, and also at Thebes in conjunction with a musical contest. On the day of the festival, the normal social distinctions were overturned, and slaves would be feasted by their masters and allowed to rampage through the town creating as much noise as they wished. This could be regarded as a temporary return to the life without toil or subordination that was supposed to have prevailed during the reign of Cronos (see above). Although the Cronia has often been viewed as a harvest-festival, this is now disputed. It was celebrated well after harvest-time at

Athens (though not all places), in the month of Hecatombeion, which is said to have been known as Cronion in early times; and Cronos' customary attribute of the sickle does not necessarily have agricultural connotations, since it is associated with him in connection with his assault against his father in the succession myth. Besides, sickles are used for similar purposes by other mythical figures who have nothing to do with agriculture (e.g. by Perseus against the Gorgon, p. 227, or by Heracles against the hydra, p. 245). The rare representations of Cronos in art show him as a majestic but sorrowful old man holding a sickle. The Romans identified him with Saturn (Saturnus or Saeturnus), an old Italian deity whose functions are obscure; Saturn's annual festival of the Saturnalia, at which slaves were granted exceptional liberties, resembled the Cronia in some notable respects, as was recognized in ancient times.

RHEA or RHEIA, the consort of Cronos, had little place in Greek cult, except in so far as she came to be identified with Cybele. She was honoured to some extent, however, in conjunction with her husband, as at Athens, where she shared a temple with him in the precinct of Olympian Zeus, and at Olympia, where one of the six altars of the Twelve Gods (see p. 75) was dedicated to the two of them; and she had a sacred cave on Mt Thaumasion in Arcadia, which was closed to everyone except her own priestess. Since it was commonly believed that Zeus was born in Crete, it is understandable that this should sometimes have been regarded as Rhea's home in the later tradition; but there is no early evidence to suggest that she was actually a goddess of Cretan origin. As the mother of the gods (i.e. of the Olympian gods of the first generation), Rhea could easily be identified with that very old and widely worshipped power, the Mother, who was honoured under all manner of names in Greece, the Aegean islands, and the Asian mainland, sometimes in conjunction with a male partner, sometimes alone. Although deeply rooted in the native tradition, the Greek cult of the Great Mother (Meter) came to be strongly influenced by the cult of the Phrygian mother-goddess Cybele, which entered the Greek world from Asia Minor. The Great Mother was identified with both Rhea and Demeter; and Rhea was often equated with Cybele, whose cult finally spread through much of the Roman Empire. This had implications for myth, above all because the Cretan Courètes, who were associated with Rhea in connection with the rearing of Zeus (see below, p. 69), came to be confused or equated with the Corybantes, attendants of Cybele in Asia Minor (see p. 202).

Much of the mythology of Rhea, orthodox and unorthodox alike, is connected with her rescue of the new-born Zeus. Since there were local legends that claimed that Zeus was born and reared in various places other than Crete, such tales take Rhea to many corners of the Greek world and of Asia Minor, see further on p. 69f. For an Arcadian legend of a comparable nature in which she is said to have hidden the new-born Poseidon in Arcadia, giving Cronos a foal to swallow in place of him, see p. 127. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Zeus sends Rhea as his envoy when he wants to inform Demeter of his decision with regard to the fate of Persephone; and in one quite early version of the story of the slaughter and revival of Pelops (see p. 420), it is Rhea who restores him to life again after he has been served as a meal to the gods.

In addition to the great deities whom he fathered as children of his marriage,

Cronos was said to have fathered another child of a very different nature, the centaur CHEIRON, by an Oceanid nymph called PHILYRA (or Phillyra). This seems to have been quite an ancient story, since there is report of an early epic account (ascribed to the *Gigantomachy*, but probably from the *Titanomachy*) in which Cronos transformed himself into a horse to have intercourse with Philyra, as would seem appropriate in view of the semi-equine form of the resulting child. Later sources explain that he transformed himself in that way because Philyra had turned herself into a mare to try to escape from him, a natural course of action for a sea-nymph who could be expected to be a shapeshifter. In a version recounted by Apollonius, he was caught in the act by Rhea while having intercourse with Philyra on an island of the same name in the Black Sea and leapt up in the form of a horse (presumably by way of disguise), while Philyra fled the area in shame to settle in Thessaly, the traditional homeland of Cheiron. Since Cheiron is called Phillyrides at the end of the *Theogony*, and is described by Pindar as a son of Cronos and Philyra, there is no reason to doubt that the underlying story was quite old. Hyginus reports that the incident took place while Cronos was roaming the world in search of the infant Zeus, and if Philyra could be associated with a remote island in the Black Sea, that could provide a plausible context for the story if it was recounted in the *Titanomachy*; but when Hyginus goes on to say that Philyra was so shocked by the appearance of her child that she prayed to Zeus to be transformed, and was thus turned into a lime tree (*philyra* in Greek), this was evidently a later addition inspired by the etymology. In accordance with his divine origin, Cheiron was a wise and noble being, and the nature of his birth serves to distinguish him from the ordinary centaurs, who were brutal and lascivious creatures of very different origin (see p. 312).

Notes

1 Hes. *Theog.* 116.

2 Ibid. 696–700.

3 Ibid. 807–14.

4 Ibid. 116–22.

5 Ibid. 123.

6 Cf. Pl. *Symp.* 195bc, Acus. 2F6; as demiurgic force, Pherecydes of Syros 7A11, B13 DK, the Orphic theogonies, etc.

7 Hes. *Theog.* 720–5.

8 Hom. *Il.* 8.13–16.

9 Pl. *Gorg.* 523b, *Phdo.* 113e; cf. Eur. *Orest.* 264–5 (Orestes fears that he may be consigned to Tartaros) and, from later times, Verg. *Aen.* 6.542ff.

10 Hes. *Theog.* 821–2, Apollod. 2.1.2, Soph. *Oed. Col.* 1574 respectively.

11 Hes. *Theog.* 123.

12 Hom. *Il.* 14.256–61 (261 quoted).

13 Hes. *Theog.* 224

14 E.g. Hom. *Il.* 8.488, Eur. *Orest.* 175ff.

15 Westermann, *Mythographoi*, Braunschweig, 1843, p. 379, Narrat. 54.

16 Paus. 1.40.5.

17 Hes. *Theog.* 124–5.

18 Genesis 1.2–5

19 Hes. *Theog.* 126–32.

20 Genesis 1.6–10.

21 Orphica fr. 28 Kern, Mousaios 2B14 DK, Epimenides 3B5 DK.

- 22 Orphica fr. 54 Kern.
- 23 Arist. *Birds* 693–702.
- 24 See for instance Aristotle's discussion of the different views of the earlier philosophers on the first principle, *Metaphysics* 1.3.
- 25 Ov. *Met.* 1.5–31.
- 26 Cf. e.g. A.R. 3.697ff.
- 27 Paus. 1.22.3 and 3.11.9 respectively.
- 28 Hom. *Il.* 3.103–7, cf. 19.258–60 (Earth invoked as witness for oath, along with Zeus, Helios, and the Erinyes).
- 29 Hom. *Hymn* 30 to *Earth the Mother of All*, 1–10.
- 30 Hes. *Theog.* 132–60.
- 31 Ibid. 161–92.
- 32 See e.g. P. Grimal (ed.), *Larousse World Mythology*, 1965, p. 35 (Egyptian), 493 (Maori).
- 33 Hes. *Theog.* 453ff. and 617ff.
- 34 Hes. *Theog.* 492–506
- 35 Apollod. 1.2.1.
- 36 Hes. *W.D.* 109–120, cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.89–112.
- 37 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.289–91, Aesch. fr. 190–3 Radt.
- 38 E.g. Apollod. 3.10.4; already in Hesiodic Catalogue, see fr. 52 and 54.
- 39 First in Call. *Hymn* 3.46ff., cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.416ff.
- 40 Paus. 2.2.2.
- 41 Polyphemos' single eye, Hom. *Od.* 9.382ff., etc., his parentage, 1.68–72, 9.528–9; Homer says nothing about the appearance or birth of the Cyclopes in his general account of them, 9.105–15, or subsequently.
- 42 E.g. Paus. 2.16.4, 2.25.7, 7.25.3, Apollod. 2.2.1.
- 43 Hes. *Theog.* 147–53; called Hecatoncheires, Palaeph. 19, Apollod. 1.1.1.
- 44 Hom. *Il.* 1.402.
- 45 Hes. *Theog.* 817–19.
- 46 Hom. *Il.* 1.396–406.
- 47 Ibid. 1.403–4.
- 48 *Titanomachia* fr. 3 Davies.
- 49 Paus. 2.1.6.
- 50 Solinus 11.16.
- 51 Hes. *Theog.* 185–6.
- 52 Ibid. 954.
- 53 Ibid. 187
- 54 Hom. *Il.* 9.447–57 and 9.571–2.
- 55 Hom. *Od.* 2.132–6, 11.277–80.
- 56 *Thebais* fr. 2 Davies.
- 57 Hom. *Il.* 19.259–60 (cf. 3.278–9, where not explicitly named).
- 58 Hes. *W.D.* 802–4.
- 59 Hom. *Il.* 19.418.
- 60 Heraclitus 22B94 DK.
- 61 Aesch. *Eum.* 51ff.
- 62 E.g. Apollod. 1.1.4; all three names can be found in the *Aeneid*, 7.324, 6.571, 12.846 respectively.
- 63 Aesch. *Eum.* 416, cf. Lyc. 437, Serv. *Aen.* 7.327; Soph. *Oed. Col.* 40, 106.
- 64 Hes. *Theog.* 133.
- 65 Ibid. 188–200.
- 66 Ibid. 201–2, Hom. *Il.* 5.370–1.
- 67 Hes. *Theog.* 133–8.
- 68 Hom. *Il.* 8.478–81.
- 69 Hes. *Theog.* 337ff., Hom. *Il.* 21.195–7.
- 70 Hom. *Il.* 14.201.
- 71 Hes. *Theog.* 389–98.
- 72 Apollod. 1.1.4.
- 73 Hes. *Theog.* 901–16, 915–17.
- 74 Helios as son of Hyperion, Hom. *Od.* 12.176, Hom. *Hymn. Demeter* 26, 74; Hyperion as title of Helios, Hom. *Il.* 8.480, Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 369.

- 75 Apollod. 1.1.3.
- 76 H.G. Güterloach, *Kumarbi*, Zurich 1946.
- 77 See e.g. P. Grimal (ed.) *Larousse World Mythology*, 1965, 73–6, Hesiod *Theogony*, ed. M.L. West, 1966, 20–1.
- 78 See M.L. West l.c. 22–7.
- 79 Hes. *Theog.* 424, 486.
- 80 Hes. *Theog.* 207–10; the meaning of the first etymology is uncertain, see West on 209.
- 81 Hes. *W.D.* 109–120, cf. *Ov. Met.* 1.89–112.
- 82 Hes. *W.D.* 109–201, cf. *Aratus* 100–36, *Ov. Met.* 1.89–150.
- 83 Silver race, Hes. *W.D.* 121–42.
- 84 Hes. *W.D.* 143–55.
- 85 *Ibid.* 156–73.
- 86 *Ibid.* 174–201.
- 87 *Pi. Ol.* 2.70–7.
- 88 Hes. *W.D.* 169–169e.
- 89 *Plut. Moralia* 419e–420a.
- 90 Aristotle *Protr.* fr. 20.
- 91 Verg. *Aen.* 8.319ff., 355–8; see also D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.34.5, 1.36.1 (Golden Age in Italy under Cronos), Euhemerus 63F16.

3

The three great divine families

As was explained in the previous chapter (see p. 21–2), there were three great divine families in Hesiod's genealogical scheme: the two families that were founded by Earth through children whom she conceived to her two self-generated sons, Ouranos (or Sky) and Pontos (or Sea), and the family of Night, which consisted mainly of beings representing dark forces in the world whom she generated from herself. Taken together, these families provide an inventory of much of the divine population, although any proper consideration of the Olympian deities will be delayed until a later stage; and there are local or minor divine beings who fall outside the scheme, some of whom will be discussed in [Chapter 9](#). In our survey of them, we will start with the most exalted, the family of Earth and Sky that was formed from the descendants of the Titans, before continuing on to that of Earth and Sea, which consisted mainly of sea-beings and monsters, and concluding with the dismal family of Night.

The families founded by the Titans, the main children of Earth and Sky

The families of the Titans can be divided into two main categories, those that account for the origin of the Olympian deities and other beings associated with the new order, and those that are made up primarily of deities who were connected with the natural world. **Cronos** and **Rhea** were the progenitors, either as parents or grandparents, of all the great Olympian deities (with one possible exception), while **Coios** and **Phoibe** were grandparents of two of them, Apollo, and Artemis, through their daughter Leto. **Themis** and **Mnemosyne** for their part bore some groups of lesser female deities to Zeus. As for the Titans whose families belong to the second category, **Oceanos** and **Tethys** brought forth offspring connected with the waters of the world, sea-nymphs, and others, as would be expected, while **Hyperion** and **Theia** founded a family that consisted primarily of deities of the sky above, including the main luminaries of the heavens. The two remaining families were founded by Titans who married outside the circle of their sisters, namely **Creios**, who fathered three sons to serve as husbands for greater goddesses of Titan descent, and **Iapetos**, who fathered Atlas, who held up the sky, and Prometheus and Iapetos,

two opponents of Zeus.

Cronos and Rhea and the origin of the Olympian deities

Cronos and Rhea were the parents of the Olympian deities of the first generation, namely **Zeus**, who displaced Cronos as lord of the universe, **Poseidon**, who became the great god of the sea, **Hades**, who became the god of the Underworld and ruler of the dead, **Hera**, the goddess of marriage and consort of Zeus, and the corn-goddess **Demeter**, and **Hestia**, goddess of the hearth.

With the possible exception of Aphrodite, if she was born as in Hesiod's account described above (see p. 27), all the other great Olympian deities were grandchildren of Cronos and Rhea, all being children of Zeus, unless Hera brought Hephaistos to birth as a child of her very own. Most were born in the period that immediately followed Zeus's rise to power, but two of them, Hermes and Dionysos, were born later during the heroic era; for a full discussion, see p. 70ff.

Coios and Phoibe, the grandparents of Apollo, Artemis, and Hecate

The Titans Coios and Phoibe, who were both thoroughly obscure figures, were remembered above all for having been the parents of the goddess LETO, who bore **Artemis** and **Apollo** to Zeus, as her twin children (see further on p. 134). Hesiod credits them with a further daughter, **ASTERIE**, who married Perses, a son of the Titan Creios (see p. 46), and bore the goddess **Hecate** to him, who is thus classed as a first cousin of Artemis.¹ As we will see later (p. 136), Asterie was sometimes drawn into the story of the birth of Artemis and Apollo, and had a mythical tale of her own in that connection; it is doubtless significant that Asterie was sometimes said to have been the original name of their birthplace, the island of Delos.

In Hesiod's scheme **HECATE**, who came to be thought of as a rather sinister goddess, is thus classed as a first cousin of Artemis. Although the two goddesses were in fact quite frequently identified from the classical period onwards, they were of a very different character in most respects and plainly of separate origin, Hecate being a goddess who was associated, at least in her final form, with magic and ghosts and the pathways of the night. It has commonly been accepted (though not without question) that she originated in Caria in the south-western corner of Asia Minor; many related place names can be found in that area, and her most important sanctuary was located there, at Lagaria. If she was indeed of Asian origin, she was plainly introduced to Greece at an early period, certainly by the seventh century BC since she is mentioned in both the *Theogony* and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

Hesiod praises her at some length and with evident personal enthusiasm as a universal goddess. He declares that she bestows all manner of gifts on worshippers who enjoy her favour, such as wealth, success at the games, skill in horsemanship, victory in war, and good counsel; and he states that Zeus granted her exceptional privileges in spite of her Titan birth, in both heaven and on earth and at sea. The only realm to be left out of account is the Underworld, the very realm that is most closely associated with her in the later tradition. Precisely because the poet makes

her the special focus of his religious ardour, his 'hymn to Hecate', as it has been called, throws little light on the individual character of the goddess.² Although we have little definite evidence on the nature of her cult in early times, there is reason to think that she was originally honoured in Asia Minor as a major goddess in official cult, rather than as a deity who was primarily concerned with the uncanny and magical. If she had no concern at all for such matters, however, it is hard to understand why she should have developed into the goddess who is familiar to us from classical and later accounts in Greece. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (probably late seventh century BC) links her to Persephone in a way that suggests that she already had Underworld connections at the time of its composition. For the poem recounts that she heard Persephone cry out as she was being abducted by Hades and told Demeter of this, and that when Persephone later returned to visit her mother, Hecate embraced her and became her attendant and companion from that time onwards.³ It is clear from references in tragedy that Hecate was associated with spooks and the pathways of the night by the classical period at any rate.⁴

In her capacity as queen of ghosts, Hecate was also the goddess of pathways (Enodios) and of crossroads (hence her title of Trioditios, 'she of the three ways'), for crossroads were regarded as great centres of ghostly and magical activity then, as in modern folklore. It is apparently for that reason that Hecate's statues often represent her in triple form, so that she may look simultaneously down all the roads that meet at the point where she is standing. She would send spooks up into the world at night, or would appear in her own right, especially at crossroads under the dim light of the moon, to roam the pathways at the head of a crew of ghosts. Her retinue, the host of Hecate, was made up of shades of the restless dead who had died prematurely or violently, or who had received no proper burial. Since she would also be accompanied by loud-barking daimonic dogs, her passage bears a resemblance to the 'Wild Hunt' of Western European folklore. The goddess and her night-wandering companions might inflict madness or epilepsy on mortals who encountered them and was certainly a source of night-terrors and bad dreams. To propitiate Hecate and her host, and so keep them at a safe distance, the Greeks would leave offerings for them at crossroads at the turn of the month; known as 'Hecate's suppers' (*deipna Hekatēs*; or simply *Hecateia*), these consisted of cakes, eggs, cheeses, and the like.⁵ Dogs were also sacrificed to Hecate, and the remains of purificatory sacrifices might be offered to the goddess and her crew with averted gaze. Magicians and sorcerers, on the other hand, would summon her aid for their own nefarious purposes, or even try to summon her up in person. The sorceress Medeia invokes her as her mistress and helper in Euripides' *Medeia*; and in Theocritus' second Idyll, a young woman is shown as praying for her help in some love-magic:

Shine brightly for me, o Moon, for it is to you that I shall chant, silent goddess, and to infernal Hecate, who causes the very dogs to tremble before her as she passes over the graves of the dead and the dark blood. Hail grim Hecate, and remain with me to the end, so that these drugs of my making may prove as powerful as any of Circe's, or of Medeia's, or of golden-haired Perimede's.⁶

And similarly on curse-tablets (*defixiones*), inscriptions on thin sheets of lead that

have survived from the ancient world, the writer of the curse often calls upon Hecate to put the curse into effect.

Children of Themis and Mnemosyne

Themis and Mnemosyne, who do not belong at all comfortably among the Titans for reasons already indicated, are drawn into the sphere of Zeus in the latter part of the *Theogony* in so far as they are said to have borne sets of female children to him, the **Seasons** and **Muses** respectively; and although we will encounter the **Moirai** (Fates) among the children of Night (see p. 59), they are reclassified as further children of Zeus and Themis in this part of the poem, which was added later.⁷ Themis and Mnemosyne can be properly associated with Zeus, as can the children here assigned to them, in so far as they represent forces that remain permanently active in the world after the Olympian order has been established.

Oceanos and Tethys and their children the Oceanids and rivers

OCEANOS was the god of the Ocean (Oceanos, a word of non-Greek origin), a great river that was thought to encircle the lands of the earth on every side. The goddess TETHYS was traditionally regarded as his wife; indeed in one tradition, as we have just seen, the pair were regarded as the first couple and the ancestors of the other gods. Hesiod, who has other ideas on that matter, acknowledges the venerable status of Oceanos, as the source of all the rivers and springs of the earth at least, by describing him as the eldest of the Titans.⁸

Even if he was not a nonentity like some of his brothers and sisters, he lived too far away and was too closely identified with his streams to make many appearances in mythical narratives. The *Iliad* reports that Rhea entrusted her daughter Hera to Oceanos and Tethys to be reared in their palace in the Ocean while Zeus was confronting Cronos and the Titans; and Pherecydes recounts a tale in which Oceanos tried to intimidate Heracles by raising his waves while the hero was crossing his waters to fetch the cattle of Geryoneus (see p. 251).⁹ The god appears on the stage in the *Prometheus Bound*, arriving on a griffin or some such creature to offer sympathy and advice to the enchained Prometheus.¹⁰ Tethys came to be identified with the sea in Hellenistic and later times; an astral myth suggests that she refuses to allow the Great Bear to set into the sea out of consideration for the feelings of her former foster-child Hera (for this polar constellation, which never sets below the horizon, was supposed to represent a former mistress of Zeus, Callisto, who had been transformed into a bear, see p. 546).¹¹

Oceanos and Tethys produced 3,000 (i.e. innumerable) sons, comprising all the RIVERS of the world (*Potamoi*, which are masculine in Greek), and 3,000 daughters, the Ocean-nymphs or OCEANIDS (Oceanidai, or Oceaninai). The functions of the latter were by no means confined to the water; Hesiod remarks that they are scattered everywhere, haunting the earth and deep waters alike, and observes in particular that they watch over the young.¹² The *Theogony* offers a catalogue of 41 Ocean-nymphs. Although the names of many of them are no more than poetic

inventions, as in the case of the Nereids, a few noteworthy figures may be found among them. **Metis**, the personification of cunning intelligence, was swallowed by Zeus after conceiving Athena to him, and reappears accordingly in a later section of the *Theogony* (see p. 73), as does the Oceanid **Eurynome**, who bore the Graces to him (see p. 74). **Peitho** (Persuasion), who presided over all forms of persuasion from the political to the amatory, was often regarded as an attendant of Aphrodite (see p. 183). **Tyche** (Fortune, equivalent to the Roman Fortuna) became a goddess of some importance in Hellenistic and later times when she came to be widely honoured in cult, both as a universal power and in relation to the fortunes of particular places or potentates. **Dione**, who was sometimes regarded as a consort of Zeus, was the mother of Aphrodite in the Homeric account (see p. 74–5). **Doris** married Nereus to become the mother of another family of sea-nymphs, the Nereids (see p. 48), **Clymene** for her part became the wife of the Titan Iapetos (see p. 46), and **Callirhoe** the wife of Chrysaor (see p. 55), **Perseis** the wife of the sun-god Helios, and **Iduia** the wife of Aietes, king of Colchis.

If Hesiod places **Styx**, the goddess of the infernal river of that name (see p. 99), at the end of his list of Ocean-nymphs, he indicates that he is doing so because he regards her as the most important of them.¹³ She married Pallas, a son of the Titans Creios and Eurybie (see p. 46), and bore him four children who were personifications of powerful forces, Zelos (Glory), Nike (Victory), Cratos (Strength of Power), and Bia (Force or Might).¹⁴ When the great war was about to break out between the Titans and the younger gods, Styx brought her children to Zeus on Olympos, since they all represented forces that could prove invaluable to him in the forthcoming conflict; and Zeus was duly grateful and paid high honour to Styx and her children, declaring that the solemn oaths of the gods would be sworn by her waters, and that her children would live with him forever (or in other words, the qualities that they represent would become attributes of his own).¹⁵ Whenever any serious disputes arose thenceforth between the gods, Zeus would send the divine messenger Iris to fetch some water from the streams of Styx in a golden jug; and if any god swore falsely by it, he would be deprived of nectar and ambrosia for a year (and so rendered insensible), and would be banished from the company of the gods for nine years.¹⁶ Two of Styx's children, Cratos and Bia, also appear at the beginning of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, in which they lead out the captive Prometheus and ask Hephaistos to chain him to a crag in accordance with the will of Zeus (see p. 87).¹⁷

On the male side of the family, Hesiod names only a few of the most notable RIVERS of the upper world by way of example; and we will narrow the range further by picking out the four that are of greatest interest from a mythological point of view, the Eridanos, Acheloos, Alpheios, and Scamandros. Originally a mythical stream that lay somewhere in north-west Europe, the ERIDANOS came to be identified with the Po¹⁸ (or sometimes with the Rhône, or indeed with both rivers in a geographically impossible combination, see p. 407). Phaethon was supposed to have plunged into it when he fell from the chariot of the Sun (see p. 43), and the Argonauts were sometimes said to have sailed along it during their return journey, to pass from the head of the Adriatic to the western Mediterranean (see p. 409). Since amber was conveyed from the Baltic to the Mediterranean by way of the river

systems of western Europe (among other routes), it is understandable that the Eridanos should have come to be regarded as its source in Greek lore;¹⁹ for the legend that was devised to explain why amber appears in the river, see p. 43. The Greeks applied the name of the river to the great river-like constellation in the southern sky that is still known as Eridanus.²⁰ The god of the Eridanos has no myths as a personal being.

The ACHELOOS, which rose in Epirus in north-western Greece and flowed to the sea near the northern entrance to the Corinthian Gulf, was the largest river in Greece. The god of the river makes a notable appearance in heroic myth in connection with Heracles, who wrestled with him for the hand of Deianeira, a daughter of Oineus, king of Calydon, whose city lay no great distance from his streams (see p. 265), and he also plays a role in the legend of the Argive hero Alcmaion, who married his daughter Callirhoe (the Fair-flowing; see p. 363). He figures, furthermore, in two transformation myths recounted by Ovid. According to one, some naiad nymphs once forgot to invite him along with other deities of the area to a local sacrifice and festival, causing him to swell with rage until his waters flooded over and washed them out to sea to become the Echinades, a group of islands just outside the Corinthian Gulf, not far from the mouth of the Acheloos.²¹ The other tale tells how he once seduced a maiden called Perimele, whose father Hippodamas was so angry to learn of it that he hurled her over a cliff into the sea. Acheloos held her up in the water, however, and appealed for the help of Poseidon, who turned her into an island that was known by her name.²²

The god of the ALPHEIOS, the longest river in the Peloponnese, was famous for his love of ARETHOUSA, a Syracusan spring-nymph. Although the idea of the river's journey through the sea to Sicily was certainly quite old, since it was known to Ibycus and Pindar, the bucolic poet Moschus (second century BC) is the first author to state that Alpheios made the journey out of love. Emerging from his river-mouth, he dived into the depths of the sea, passing through it in such a way that his own waters never mingled with its salt waters.²³ Transformation myths were devised to explain the origin of the Syracusan spring, and even of the river itself. According to Ovid, Arethousa was originally a Peloponnesian nymph who was more interested in hunting than love, but inadvertently awakened the love of Alpheios by bathing naked in his waters after a hunting trip. When he then set off in pursuit of her, Artemis tried to deliver her from him by enveloping her in a mist and transforming her into a stream; but since Alpheios simply resumed his original form to mingle his waters with those of the newly created stream, Artemis was obliged to take further action by opening up a cleft in the earth to enable Arethousa to escape to Sicily, where she formed the spring that bore her name.²⁴ Ovid does not state that Alpheios travelled to Syracuse thereafter to pursue his love, as in the traditional story; and we are presumably not meant to assume this, for Artemis arranged her removal to Sicily for the specific purpose of preventing Alpheios from mingling with her. In Pausanias' account, Alpheios also acquired his final form as the result of a transformation, for he was originally a Peloponnesian hunter who fell in love with a huntress called Arethousa. As is generally the case with huntresses in myth, she had no desire to marry him or anyone else, and therefore fled across the sea to Syracuse, where she

was turned into a spring in unexplained circumstances; and Alpheios was then turned into a river ‘out of love’ (presumably to enable him to mingle with the spring).²⁵

The SCAMANDROS (or Scamander in Latin) is familiar from the *Iliad* as the main river of the Trojan plain. Homer reports that it sprang up from two adjoining springs, one steaming hot and the other ice cold, and was known to the gods as Xanthos (the Yellow River, evidently because it was coloured by the soil that was carried in its waters).²⁶ Scamandros was highly honoured by the Trojans, who sacrificed many bulls to him and used to cast living horses into his streams.²⁷ While Achilles was advancing against Troy after the death of Patroclos, he gravely offended Scamandros by polluting his waters with a multitude of Trojan corpses; and, on finding that his protests were greeted with contempt, the river-god overflowed his banks, casting the bodies ashore and almost drowning Achilles. When he then called on the assistance of Simoeis, the other main river of the Trojan plain, Achilles would surely have perished if Hera (an eager supporter of the Greeks) had not asked Hephaistos to force Scamandros to return to his courses by setting fire to his banks.²⁸ Later sources report that Teucros, the first king of Troy, was a son of Scamandros, and that two subsequent kings, Tros and Laomedon, were married to daughters of his (see pp. 442ff.).²⁹ This reflects a common pattern in which primordial rulers or their wives are classed as children of local river-gods, as is understandable since rivers are such prominent features of the primordial landscape.

Hyperion and Theia and the origin of the luminaries of the sky and main winds

The Titan HYPERION and his wife and sister THEIA, who have no myths of their own, were the parents of three children who brought light to the heavens, Helios (the Sun, Sol in Latin), Selene (the Moon, Luna in Latin), and Eos (Dawn, Aurora in Latin).³⁰ These deities were little worshipped in Greece, although HELIOS was often invoked in oaths in his capacity as an all-seeing god who would be able to bear witness to any perjury. His most important cultic centre was Rhodes, where he was honoured as a god of the very first rank. Pindar recounts a legend that explains how he came to be lord of the island. Long ago, when the gods were dividing the earth among themselves, Helios was granted no land of his own because he happened to be absent (presumably on his daily journey through the sky). Although Zeus offered to make amends by ordering a recasting of the lot, Helios told him that he would be satisfied with a wonderful new land that he had seen rising up from the sea, the fertile island of Rhodes. So he took Rhodes as his bride and fathered seven sons by her, one of whom (named elsewhere as Cercaphos) was destined to father the eponyms of the three greatest cities of the island, Ialsysos, Cameiros, and Lindos.³¹ On the mainland, Helios was most highly honoured at Corinth; see pp. 128–9 for the story of how he competed with Poseidon for the city and land. From the classical period onwards, he was sometimes identified with Apollo, who was a radiant deity like himself.³² The fact that both gods were archers (the Sun’s rays being described as his arrows by a common and natural metaphor) may have encouraged the

identification.

In art and literature Helios is normally represented as a charioteer who drives across the sky each day from east to west (although he is also imagined very occasionally as riding on horseback, or as flying on his own wings); in pictorial images, his head is often surrounded with a nimbus and rays of light. His chariot-team consists of four (or less commonly, two) gleaming horses, which are usually winged in earlier images. Poets liked to give them appropriate names such as Pyroeis (Fiery), Eoos (Orient), Aithon or Aithops (Blazing), Phlegon (Flaming), and the like.³³ Helios plunged into the stream of Ocean in the furthestmost west after his daily journey, where he bathed and relaxed before travelling back to the east during the night. It was naïvely imagined that he made this journey by floating around the encircling Ocean in a huge golden cup, which had been made for him for that purpose by Hephaistos; he lent it to Heracles on one or two occasions as we will see (pp. 251 and 256). His palace lay near the sunrise in the east (although we occasionally hear of a western palace in the late tradition). According to the early elegiac poet Mimnermus, he kept his sunbeams in a golden chamber in his palace.³⁴

It is reported in the *Odyssey* that Helios owned seven herds of immortal cattle and seven flocks of sheep, which were pastured by two of his daughters on Thrinacia, an island vaguely situated in the remote west (though later identified with Sicily). When detained on this island by bad weather, the followers of Odysseus killed some of the cattle to satisfy their hunger even though their leader had expressly ordered them not to, an act of sacrilege that was reported to Helios by his daughter Lampetie. Helios was so angry that he approached Zeus and the other gods with his grievance, threatening to desert the sky and shine among the dead in Hades if he was not adequately avenged; so Zeus took action on his behalf by striking Odysseus' ship with a thunderbolt, causing the death of everyone on board apart from Odysseus himself (see also on p. 510).³⁵ Augeias, king of Elis, was sometimes said to have acquired his innumerable cattle (see p. 248) from his father Helios; according to Theocritus, twelve of them were special swan-white beasts that were sacred to Helios. Helios also appears in another context in the *Odyssey*, as the all-seeing god who informed Hephaistos that his wife Aphrodite was engaging in an adulterous love affair with Ares (see p. 185). By virtue of his position in the sky, he is also able to perform a comparable service for Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, by telling her that her daughter has been carried away by Hades (see p. 94).³⁶

Helios married Perse or Perseis, a daughter of Oceanos, who bore him two children according to the earliest tradition, as attested in the *Odyssey* and *Theogony*, namely Aietes, king of Colchis, who plays a central role in the legend of the Argonauts (see pp. 405ff.), and the enchantress Circe, whose remote island home in the far west was visited by Odysseus (see p. 507) and the Argonauts (see p. 409). Further children came to be credited to the couple in the later tradition, most notably Pasiphae, the wife of Minos, and Aloeus, a primordial king of Sicyon (see p. 555).³⁷

His afore-mentioned daughters who tended his cattle on Thrinacia, Lampetie, and Phaethousa, were borne to him by a certain Neaira according to the *Odyssey*, or else by Rhode, daughter of Asopos.³⁸ By far the most famous of his illegitimate children,

however, was his son PHAETHON ('the Radiant'), who was borne to him by CLYMENE, the wife of Merops, king of the Ethiopians; this Clymene is said to have been a daughter of Oceanos, like the wife of Helios (though she must obviously be distinguished from the Oceanid of that name who is the wife of Iapetos in the *Theogony*).³⁹ Although there is no very early evidence for the famous legend of Phaethon's misadventure with his father's chariot, the story was probably recounted in the Hesiodic literature⁴⁰ (whether the *Catalogue* or the *Astronomy*) and certainly in the lost *Heliades* of Aeschylus. Phaethon was presented in that play as having set off in the chariot with the (perhaps reluctant) consent of his father, who tried to offer him some practical advice as he departed.⁴¹ We are told in Hellenistic sources that Zeus struck him with a thunderbolt because he was unable to keep the chariot on course, so causing the earth to be in danger of being set on fire, or else that he was simply thrown out of the chariot as it fell out of control.⁴² The former idea won general acceptance. The story takes the following form in the fullest narrative by Ovid. Phaethon was reared by Clymene in her husband's palace, which lay in the remote east, no great distance from the palace of Helios. She told him that he was a son of Helios, and he bragged about his high descent until one of his comrades could stand it no longer and retorted that it was a lie. When he approached his mother for reassurance, she swore by Helios himself that she had spoken the truth and advised him to visit his father's palace if he wanted further confirmation. So he set off for the splendid palace of the sun-god, which had walls and pillars of gleaming metal and a roof of ivory; and he received a kindly welcome from Helios, who acknowledged him as his son and offered him the choice of whatever he most desired. When he responded by asking to drive the chariot of the sun across the sky on the following day, Helios tried to warn him of the dangers, but finally had to allow him to do so in accordance with his promise. As Helios had foreseen, Phaethon was unable to control the spirited chariot-horses and drove through the sky on an erratic course, sometimes soaring too high and sometimes descending too low, much to the alarm of Earth, who began to fear for her own survival as her surface caught fire and her waters dried up. So she appealed urgently to Zeus, who hurled a thunderbolt at Phaethon, causing him to fall from the chariot and plunge to his death far below in the river Eridanos (see p. 43).⁴³ All the main features of this story can be found in earlier sources; there was also a somewhat different version in which Phaethon mounted the chariot in secret without gaining his father's permission.⁴⁴

Phaethon's sisters, the HELIADES, mourned for him so grievously after his death that Zeus or the gods took pity on them and transformed them into poplar trees that stood beside the Eridanos. This is an ancient story that already appeared in the above-mentioned play by Aeschylus, in which the Heliades formed the chorus. The resinous tears that they shed into the river accounted for the origin of amber, according to an idea that is first stated in Euripides' *Hippolytos* (but is also ascribed to 'Hesiod'). For another mythical account of the origin of amber, see pp. 142–3.⁴⁵ In the version of Phaethon's story in which he mounted his father's chariot in secret, his sisters were transformed into the trees for quite another reason, because they had yoked the chariot for him against their father's orders.⁴⁶ The death of Phaethon was also lamented by CYCNOS, king of the Ligurians, a very fine musician who had been

a relation or friend of his, or indeed his lover. The gods (or Apollo specifically) pitied his sorrow and turned him into a swan (*kyknos* in Greek), a bird that shares his musical nature and sings mournfully before it dies.⁴⁷ Some accounts add that Cynos was transferred to the sky to become the constellation of the Swan (Cygnus).⁴⁸

When a myth was devised to explain the origin of the heliotrope, a plant that keeps its flowers constantly turned towards the sun, Helios was bound to play a central part in it. In the earliest surviving account, by Ovid, the tale runs as follows. Helios fell desperately in love with LEUCOTHOE, daughter of Orchamos, king of Persia, forgetting all his previous loves, and assumed the form of Leucothoe's mother to make his way into her room. He then dismissed her attendants, and now revealing his identity, resumed his true form and splendour to seduce her. He had a former mistress, however, called Clytie (described elsewhere as a sister of Leucothoe), who was so jealous of Leucothoe that she caused it to become generally known that she had a lover, persuading her father above all of that fact. In his anger, the brutal king buried her beneath the earth, and she died before Helios could come to her rescue. Overcome by sorrow, he sprinkled nectar over her body and the surrounding soil, causing an incense-tree to grow up in place of her. As for Clytie, he would have nothing to do with her, and she pined away for love of him, refusing all food and drink, until she finally turned into a heliotrope; and she retains her love for Helios even in this new form, as is witnessed in the movement of the flowers of the heliotrope. Although this story is ascribed to Hesiod in one source, one may doubt that it really originated in any Hesiodic text. In another account, the father of Leucothoe is called Orchomenos, which would imply that her story was now set in Boeotia in mainland Greece.⁴⁹

The gently radiant SELENE (or Selenaiā), the goddess of the moon, could be pictured as a charioteer like her brother; a remarkable sculpture of the head of one of her chariot-horses can be seen among the Parthenon marbles. Some authors specify that she drives a pair rather than a four like her brother, in accordance with the standard image in vase-paintings and other works of art. She is drawn by two snow-white horses or, occasionally, by oxen. Or in some portrayals, she rides through the heavens on a horse (or steer, or mule, or even a ram), facing sideways with both legs on one flank of her mount.⁵⁰ There is an attractive literary account of her journey through the sky in the *Homeric Hymn to Selene*, which also reports that she once slept with Zeus and bore him a daughter called Pandeia (an obscure figure whose name may have been derived from a title of Selene).⁵¹

The only notable legend recorded for Selene is the one that tells how she fell in love with Endymion, a hero of Elis in the western Peloponnese, see further on pp. 38–9. There is also an interesting but poorly attested legend in which Pan is said to have set out to seduce her. Vergil mentions in passing that Pan tried to lure her into the woods by offering her the snowy fleece of a sheep; and the Hellenistic poet Nicander is reported to have offered an account in which Pan disguised himself in a fleece (or possibly turned himself into a ram) to approach her.⁵² The rusticity of the tale suggests that it may have originated as a local legend in Arcadia. Just as Helios came to be equated with Apollo, Selene was quite often equated with Artemis after the classical period, as already seems to be implied in a fragment from Aeschylus

that suggests that she was a daughter of Leto.⁵³ She was of importance in magic as a goddess whom one could approach in the laying of spells, especially love-spells; in the second *Idyll* of Theocritus, a girl who has been forsaken by her lover is shown as invoking her when laying a spell of that kind.⁵⁴

There is some disagreement about the descent of Selene. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, her father was Pallas, son of Megamedes (otherwise unknown),⁵⁵ who may perhaps be identified with the Pallas who is classed as a son of the Titan Creios in the *Theogony*. Or, in the *Homeric Hymn to Helios*, Hyperion is said to have fathered her and her two siblings by Euryphaessa ('she who shines far and wide') rather than by Theia.⁵⁶ One or two passages in tragedy refer to her as a daughter of Helios (rather than as his sister), which seems appropriate enough in view of her borrowed light.⁵⁷ Herse (Dew), the goddess or personification of the dew, is described as a daughter of Zeus and Selene in a lyric fragment from Alcman,⁵⁸ but this is really no more than an allegorical fancy referring to the heavy dewfall associated with clear moonlit nights.

The third child of the union between Hyperion and Theia was EOS (the Dawn, Latin Aurora). As a light-bringing goddess who ascends into the sky ahead of Helios, she represents something more than what we might ordinarily understand by the dawn, namely the light of the new day (and, to an increasing extent, even daylight without qualification). Hemera, Day personified, was often identified with Eos as a consequence, even if she is a separate being in the *Theogony* (see p. 19). Eos is usually shown as winged in works of art, unlike her brother and sister; but in her capacity as a light-bringer, she ascends in a chariot just as they do, commonly a two-horse chariot like that of Selene. In poetry from Homer onwards, she is described by picturesque epithets that refer to the colours of the sky at dawn, such as 'rosy-fingered' (*rhododaktylos*) or 'saffron-robbed' (*krokoeplos*).⁵⁹

Eos has a comparatively well-marked personality, being pictured as an amorous goddess who liked to abduct handsome young men. The most famous and best-recorded story of this kind is that which tells of her relationship with TITHONOS, a son of Laomedon, king of Troy, and a brother of Priam. The legend was plainly very ancient since both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* refer to Eos as rising 'from her bed beside lordly Tithonos' when she sets off to bring the light of day to gods and mortals.⁶⁰ The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* provides the earliest full account of this story. Eos carried Tithonos' off and asked Zeus to render him immortal, but never thought to ask in addition that he should retain his youth and so be exempted from the ravages of age. While he was still young, the two of them lived happily together by the streams of Ocean at the edges of the earth; but when the first grey hairs began to sprout on his head and chin, Eos abandoned his bed even though she continued to take care of him in her house, providing him with food and ambrosia and fine clothing; and when he became so feeble that he could no longer move his limbs, she laid him in a room behind closed doors, where he has babbled away helplessly ever since.⁶¹ According to a familiar tale that first appears in the classical period, Eos finally transformed him into an insect noted for its song, the cicada (*tettix*).⁶² This idea was presumably inspired by the reference to the ceaseless talking (*aspetos phēmē*) of the incapacitated Tithonos in the Homeric hymn; the high-pitched talk of

old men is compared to the singing of cicadas in a famous passage in the *Iliad*.⁶³ It may also be relevant that cicadas were supposed to survive on dew alone (for it would seem that Tithonos was no longer fed when he was shut behind closed doors). It is stated in one late source that Eos transformed him so as to be able to enjoy his song.⁶⁴ In earlier and happier days, she bore him two children, namely Memnon, king of the Ethiopians, who fought as an ally of the Trojans in the last stages of the Trojan War (see p. 476), and Emathion, who was killed by Heracles in Ethiopia (see p. 256).⁶⁵ We should imagine that the couple lived somewhere in the remote east near the dawn. Their son Memnon was usually associated with the east accordingly, as we will see, rather than with the African Ethiopia.

The *Odyssey* refers to two other love affairs of Eos, stating in the first place that she abducted the hunter Orion, causing resentment among the gods, who tended to disapprove of liaisons between goddesses and mortals; so they incited Artemis to kill him in his new home of Ortygia (usually identified with Delos in later times).⁶⁶ This account of the death of Orion was displaced by other stories in the later tradition (see p. 562). The *Odyssey* also mentions that Eos was so attracted by the beauty of Cleitos, son of Mantios, a grandson of the great seer Melampous, that she carried him away to dwell with the immortals.⁶⁷ It is reported in the *Theogony* (in a section added after Hesiod's time) that Eos loved a certain Cephalos and bore him a son Phaethon (not to be confused with the son of Helios above), who was seized by Aphrodite to serve in her temple.⁶⁸ Although this Cephalos – who was apparently a son of Hermes – was properly a separate figure from the Cephalos, son of Deion, who was the husband of Procris in Attic legend, the two were sometimes identified in the later tradition, and Eos was occasionally introduced into the legend of Cephalos and Procris as a consequence (see further on p. 326). To explain the over-susceptible nature of Eos, some claimed that Aphrodite caused her to be constantly falling in love to punish her for having slept with Ares (who was Aphrodite's lover or husband).⁶⁹

In addition to her many lovers, Eos had an official consort, ASTRAIOS (Starry), a son of the Titan Creios and the Oceanid Eurybia. Her children by this marriage were the stars of the heavens and the three main winds, Boreas (the North Wind), Zephyros (the West Wind), and Notos (the South Wind).⁷⁰

Hesiod singles out the Morning Star, HEOSPHOROS, as the most notable of the starry children of Eos. It should be remembered in this connection that the planets or 'wandering stars' (*planētes asteres*) were not regarded as being essentially different from the fixed stars. The planet now known as Venus was called Heosphoros (Dawn-bringer) or Phosphoros (Light-bringer) in Greek in so far as it appears as the Morning Star, and Hesperos in so far as it appears as the Evening Star (*hesperos astēr*), although it was recognized from quite early times, certainly before the classical period, that the two stars are one and the same. Even if Eos were not the mother of all the stars, it might naturally be assumed that she would be the mother of Heosphoros because he is the forerunner of the dawn, and that may perhaps have been the initial thought that prompted Hesiod to make her the mother of all the stars and give her a starry husband. Heosphoros has no myths as a personal being, although he makes some slight appearance in the heroic genealogies (e.g. as the

father of Ceux, see p. 380).

Eos was presumably regarded as a suitable mother for the winds because the wind often rises at dawn in Greece. Hesiod classes the three greatest winds as her children while all the harmful winds of an inferior nature are described as offspring of the monstrous Typhon (see p. 79). Although ZEPHYROS (the West Wind) is characterized as a cleansing wind in the *Theogony* and tends to be stormy in Homer, he is customarily viewed as mild and gentle in the later tradition (an idea preserved in our English word ‘zephyr’). In the *Iliad*, the divine messenger Iris visits ‘fierce-blowing Zephyros’ in his home, while he is dining there with the other winds, to summon him and Boreas to blow on the funeral pyre of Patroclus, for Achilles had prayed for their help after it had failed to kindle.⁷¹ As we will see (p. 53), Homer states that Zephyros fathered the horses of Achilles by a Harpy. BOREAS, the violent North Wind, descended on Greece from his northern homeland of Thrace. His most important story is the Athenian legend that told how he abducted Oreithuia, a princess of that land, to make her his wife (see further on p. 325). She bore him twin sons, Zetes and Calais, the Boreads (Boreadai), who shared something of their father’s nature as winged beings who could fly swiftly through the air and were famous for their pursuit of the Harpies (see p. 403). As a consequence of his marital connection with Athens, Boreas brought special help to the Athenians on more than one occasion (see p. 325). NOTOS, the god of the moist west wind (which was considered to be unhealthy) never developed into a mythical figure of any significance. The Winds were usually pictured as winged and bearded, and often as wild in appearance. According to differing conceptions that can both be found in Homer, the winds could be regarded either as independent agents or as being subject to the control of Aiolos, the lord of the winds (see p. 506).⁷²

The three sons of Creios and Eurybia

The Titan CREIOS (or Crios), a thoroughly obscure figure, married a daughter of Pontos (Sea) called Eurybia. They had three sons, Astraios, Pallas, and Perses, who were of genealogical significance alone as the husbands of Eos, Styx, and Asterie respectively, goddesses of greater individuality than themselves.⁷³ ASTRAIOS (Starry) has already been considered in connection with Eos, as the father of the stars and three main winds. PALLAS (genitive *Pallantis*, to be distinguished from Pallas, gen. *Pallados*, the well-known title of Athena) married STYX, the goddess of the infernal river of that name (see p. 99), and fathered Victory and three other personifications by her, see further on p. 39. PERSES, for his part, married Asterie, the youngest daughter of the Titans Coios and Phoibe, and fathered the goddess Hecate by her (see p. 37); Hesiod remarks that he was pre-eminent for his wisdom, but no myths are recorded to show how he displayed it. He should be distinguished from two mortal heroes of the same name, a brother of Aietes (see p. 413) and a son of Perseus (see p. 227).

Iapetos and Clymene, the parents of Atlas and Prometheus

The Titan IAPETOS married the Oceanid Clymene (or the Oceanid Asia) and fathered four sons by her, **Prometheus** and **Epimetheus**, whose interrelated myths will be considered in the next chapter (see pp. 86ff.), **Atlas**, who held up the heavens, and the comparatively obscure **Menoitios**.⁷⁴ Hesiod indicates that MENOITIOS clashed with Zeus, like his more famous brother Prometheus, but offers no details, merely stating that Zeus struck him with a thunderbolt and hurled him down to Erebus (the nether darkness, presumably of Tartaros) on account of his folly and presumption.⁷⁵ It appears that later authors knew little more about him than we do. Apollodorus remarks, to be sure, that he was struck down by Zeus during the war between the Titans and the younger gods (evidently because he was supporting the Titans), but this may well be some mythographer's conjecture rather than a genuine early tradition.⁷⁶

ATLAS contributed in his way to the ordering of the world by performing the arduous but essential duty of holding up the sky. Much as in the case of Menoitios, it was suggested in later times that he had angered Zeus by supporting (or even leading) the Titans in their war with the younger gods, and was burdened with this duty as a consequence;⁷⁷ but there is no reason to assume that it was regarded as a punishment for some specific offence in the early tradition. According to the *Theogony*, he supports the sky on his head and hands, standing at the edges of the earth near the Hesperides (i.e. in the far west); or, in a gentler account in the *Odyssey*, he holds the tall pillars that keep the earth and sky apart, apparently standing somewhere in the sea.⁷⁸ In works of art he is usually shown holding up a globe that represents the sky (and sometimes has figures of the constellations marked on it accordingly). Although Pausanias states that he was shown holding up the earth and sky in images on the chest of Cypselos and the barriers around the statue of Zeus at Olympia,⁷⁹ the artists had presumably intended the globe to represent the sky alone. Herodotus is our earliest source for the rationalistic account in which sky was said to rest on Mt Atlas in the western reaches of North Africa.⁸⁰ Atlas lived so far away and was so constrained by his task that there was little occasion for him to appear in heroic myth; indeed, the story in which Heracles took over his burden while he went to fetch the apples of the Hesperides (see p. 257) is his only myth that is at all ancient. He was of genealogical importance nonetheless as the founder of one of the great heroic families, that of the Atlantids, which was formed from the descendants of the seven daughters who were borne to him by his wife Pleione, daughter of Oceanos, see further on pp. 439ff. There is no mention in the *Theogony* of him having any wife and family, and his seven daughters are first named in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* ⁸¹ (Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1 Heracles holds up the sky for Atlas. Drawing after a Greek vase-painting.

The family of Earth and Sea

To move on to the second of Earth's families, the one that she founded by mating with her self-generated son PONTOS or SEA is of mixed character, consisting partly of sea-gods and sea-nymphs as might be expected of descendants of Sea, partly of winged aerial beings, and partly of monsters who needed to be kept apart from the higher gods and might be fittingly imagined as having sprung from the formless element. Earth bore three sons to Sea, two 'old men of the sea', **Nereus** and **Phorcys**, and the mysterious **Thaumas** (who may have been a sea-god too, although there is no evidence to show that). Nereus fathered a family of sea-nymphs, the Nereids, while Thaumas became the father of Iris, the swift-flying goddess of the rainbow, and of the Harpies, who were originally wind-spirits. Phorcys, for his part, married his sister **Ceto** to found an alarming family of monsters. **Eurybia**, the last of these children of Earth and Sea, married the Titan Creios, and her family has thus already been considered in the next chapter along with the other families of Titan descent, see p. 46. Sea himself was barely personified and had no myths or cult; the great god of the seas in the Greek tradition was Poseidon, an Olympian deity who was of later birth.⁸²

Nereus and Doris and their daughters the Nereids

NEREUS, the eldest son of Pontos and Gaia, was an ancient sea-god who belonged to an older generation than Poseidon and was rather cast into the shade by him as were other 'old men of the sea'. Of very limited significance in myth and virtually none in

cult, he is pictured in the *Iliad* as living in a shining cave in the depths of the sea with his many daughters, the Nereid sea-nymphs, who were of far greater importance than he was and have even survived into modern folklore. Hesiod describes him as being truthful and never-deceiving, evidently because he possessed prophetic powers, and states that he is called ‘the old one’ (*gēron*, a title suggestive of the wisdom of old age) because he is unerring and gentle and ever-mindful of what is right.⁸³ As a very ancient sea-god of subordinate rank to Poseidon, he could thus be identified with the ‘old man of the sea’, who is usually an anonymous figure in the Homeric epics and was generally honoured as such in cult. The title was also applied to other sea-gods of a comparable nature, such as Phorcys (who is a brother of Nereus in Hesiod’s genealogical scheme, see below) and Proteus, who are both called by that name in the *Odyssey*.

Nereus was credited with prophetic powers, as was characteristic of sea-gods of this kind, and also with the ability to transform himself at will, a power that was commonly attributed to gods and nymphs who inhabited the formless element. He had only a single story of any real note, the quite ancient myth in which Heracles was said to have wrestled with him to force him to reveal the route to the Hesperides (see p. 255), much as Menelaos and his companions forced Proteus to disclose such secrets in a famous scene in the *Odyssey* (see p. 496). Although he tried to escape by transforming himself into water and fire and all manner of different beasts, the hero kept a firm grip on him until he was finally willing to speak;⁸⁴ the struggle is depicted on vase-paintings from the sixth and fifth centuries BC, which show Nereus with a fish-tail in the earliest representations but later in fully human form. In another quite early tale, Nereus delivered the cup of the sun to Heracles after the sun-god Helios had offered to lend it to him (see pp. 250–1);⁸⁵ and in one of Horace’s odes, he imposes a calm to halt the ship of Paris after his abduction of Helen and rises up from the sea to warn him of all the evil consequences that will follow from his action.⁸⁶ It is sometimes suggested in late sources that he reared Aphrodite in his home under the sea.⁸⁷

Nereus married the Oceanid Doris and fathered a large family of sea-nymphs, the NEREIDS (Nereides), who lived with their parents under the sea (Figure 3.2).⁸⁸ They were of considerable significance in popular belief and cult, and Herodotus reports, for instance, that the Persians offered sacrifice to them in accordance with Greek practice when their fleet was once struck by a persistent storm off the coast of Greece. With very few exceptions, they remained together as virgins, emerging from their home only to sport with the sea-beasts in the waves above or to dance on the shore.⁸⁹ If Nereids were a sort of mermaid in ancient belief (although not pictured as fish-tailed), their name has come to be applied to land-nymphs and fairies in modern Greece, displacing the Dryads, Oreads, and so forth. By another shift of meaning, the name Gorgon has come to be applied to mermaids.



Figure 3.2. A Nereid riding a cuttlefish. Drawing after a Greek vase-painting.

Poets exercised their ingenuity in devising pretty names for the Nereids, mostly referring to the sea and seafaring, such as Neso or Nesaie, ‘island-girl’, Eulimine, ‘good-harbour-woman’, Cumatolege, ‘wave-stiller’, and Pontoporeia, ‘sea-farer’. Hesiod provides a catalogue of 50 names, and other lists, which vary to differing extents, may be found in the *Iliad*, Apollodorus, and Hyginus.⁹⁰ The Nereids are rarely accorded any specific role as a group in mythical narratives, although Homer reports that they went ashore with their sister Thetis to mourn the deaths of Patroclos and Achilles (see pp. 474 and 478), and it is stated in later epic that they helped the Argonauts through the Wandering Rocks at the bidding of Hera (see p. 409).

Three Nereids emerge as separate personalities with stories of their own, and two of these were figures of very high note from an early period, Amphitrite as the consort of Poseidon and queen of the sea (see further on p. 129), and Thetis as the mother of the great hero Achilles, whom she bore after suffering the exceptional fate of being forced into marriage with a mortal. And a third sister, Galateia, appears in a relatively late myth of less serious nature, in which she was said to have aroused the helpless love of the one-eyed ogre Polyphemos. Mention should perhaps also be made of the Nereid Psamathe, who became the mother of Phocos after being caught by surprise by Aiacos, king of Aegina (see p. 427 and [Figure 3.3](#)).



Figure 3.3. Peleus and his wife, the Nereid Thetis. Tondo of an attic red-figure kylix (drinking cup) from Vulci. © bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY.

The myths of Thetis, who married Peleus, king of Phthia in Thessaly, and bore Achilles to him, will be considered later in connection with the birth of her son (see p. 429ff) and her further involvement with him during the Trojan War. GALATEIA attracted the desire of a most improbable suitor, the Cyclops Polyphemos, who is familiar from the *Odyssey* as the ogre who captured Odysseus and ate some of his men (see p. 506). In so far as his character is softened by the effects of love, he is presented as being a less savage and fearsome creature than in Homer's portrayal, and he sets out to win the favour of the sea-nymph with such naïvely inept love-songs as his none-too-copious intelligence can suggest. There could be no question, of course, of her yielding to her uncouth admirer, and she is able to keep him at a safe distance by remaining in her own element. This one-sided love affair was set in Sicily, and the story can be traced back to a dithyramb of Philoxenus of Cythera (c. 436–380 BC) entitled the *Cyclops*, of which only a few brief fragments survive. It told how Polyphemos took up the lyre to sing the praises of Galateia, and of how Odysseus tried to win his release from the ogre by offering to put his ingenuity to work to help him to gain his desire.⁹¹ This poem became very celebrated, not least because it was supposed that the depiction of Polyphemos was intended as a satirical portrait of Dionysios I, the despotic tyrant of Syracuse. The theme, which offered scope for both pathos and comedy, proved appealing to subsequent poets, and a sample of the lovesick ogre's singing can be found in the eleventh *Idyll* of Theocritus.

He is sadly aware that his single eye and squat nose have not advanced his cause with the nymph; and yet, all the same, if she would only come up from the sea, he could offer her an abundance of milk and cheese, and fawns and bear cubs as pets, and a snug cave to share with him in the mountain side.⁹²

Polyphemos has a rival in Ovid's account in the form of a handsome youth called ACIS, a son whom Faunus (a rustic Italian god comparable to Pan) had fathered by a local water-nymph called Symaethis. One day, after addressing his customary appeals to Galatea from a hill beside the sea, Polyphemos suddenly noticed that she was lying behind a rock with Acis, and he reverted to his former ogreish ways in his jealousy, tearing a huge rock out of the side of Mt Etna and hurling it at his rival to crush him beneath it. Galatea turned the blood of her dead lover into water as it trickled from under the rock, so creating the stream on Etna that bore his name, and she turned Acis himself into the horned god of the stream. In his new form as a god, he retained his original features except that he was now larger and his face was deep blue in colour.⁹³ This transformation story, which reappears in a few later Latin sources without any great variation, may have been devised by Ovid himself. If Polyphemos was occasionally presented as having succeeded in his desire, it was simply because Galatea seemed a suitable mother for Galates (or Galas), the eponym of the Galatians⁹⁴ (i.e. Celts of Gaul; the province of Galatia in Asia Minor acquired that name because Celtic immigrants settled there in the third century BC).

According to a tale from the late tradition, Nereus had an only son called NERITES who became the special favourite of Aphrodite while she was still living in the sea (for it is assumed here that she lived there for some while after being born from the sea-foam that surrounded the severed genitals of Sky, see p. 27). When she set off to Olympos to join the other gods, she wanted to take Nerites with her and offered him a pair of wings (evidently to equip him for the journey); but he preferred to remain beneath the waves with his parents and many sisters. Angered by the rejection, the goddess turned him into a sea-snail (*nēritēs*) and bestowed the wings on Eros instead, making him her constant companion from that time onwards. There is also mention of another story in which Nerites was a favourite of Poseidon and was transformed by Helios, who was angered for some reason by the speed at which he drove his chariot across the waves.⁹⁵

Thaumas and Electra and their daughters Iris and the Harpies

THAUMAS, the next son of Pontos, is an obscure figure with no legends or cult; perhaps he was another old man of the sea. His name could be interpreted as meaning 'the wondrous' in Greek, even if it was not necessarily of Greek origin. He married Electra, daughter of Oceanos, who bore him some swift-moving winged daughters; Iris and the Harpies.⁹⁶

IRIS was the goddess or spirit of the rainbow, the Greek name of which, *iris*, is still preserved in words such as iridescent. Since the rainbow that 'the son of Cronos has set in the sky as a portent for men'⁹⁷ is a sign and a wonder, Thaumas is very suitable father for her, and Electra is a suitable mother too, in so far as her name is suggestive of shining brightness. The chief role of Iris, where she is not simply a

personification of the rainbow itself, is to act as a messenger for the gods. Although she monopolizes this role in the *Iliad*, Hermes largely displaces her in that regard in the subsequent literature (see p. 175). From the classical period onwards, she came to be regarded increasingly as the special servant of Hera, as Hermes is of Zeus, and Callimachus humorously portrays her as constantly crouching under the throne of the great goddess like a loyal hound, ever ready to run errands at her whim and call.⁹⁸ In works of art, which generally depict her as winged and often in a short tunic with a herald's staff, she appears quite frequently in a subordinate role, acting as escort to the greater deities (as when she conducts them to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis) or sometimes as their cupbearer. Although 'golden-winged Iris', as Homer calls her, makes many appearances in the *Iliad*, carrying messages from Zeus (or from Hera on one occasion) to mortals or other gods, or sometimes acting on her own initiative, as when she summons the Winds to kindle the pyre of Patroclus,⁹⁹ she is rarely introduced into mythical narratives thereafter, making only two appearances that deserve to be singled out for mention. In the *Cypria*, an early epic in the Trojan cycle, it was she who first told Menelaos that his wife Helen had been abducted¹⁰⁰ (for he was away in Crete at the time, see pp. 456 and 460); and in Argonautic myth, she was said to have intervened to restrain the Boreads from killing her sisters, the Harpies (see p. 403).¹⁰¹ That she had a place in cult is asserted by a single witness, the obscure Hellenistic author Samos of Delos, who says that she was worshipped on Hecate's island near Delos.¹⁰²

The earliest accounts represent the HARPIES as being exactly what their name implies in Greek, 'Snatchers', as female death-spirits who snatch people away causing them to disappear suddenly and without trace. There is no indication that Hesiod viewed them as being in any way monstrous, and they were originally pictured as winged women who looked very similar to Iris, hence their enrolment as her sisters; alarming though they may have been in their nature as snatchers, vase-paintings from the classical period portray them as beautiful. As time progressed, however, they came increasingly to be imagined as ugly, bird-like creatures with large talons and a woman's head.

Although Hesiod says nothing about their activities, merely observing that they keep pace with the blasts of the wind,¹⁰³ they are mentioned on three occasions in the *Odyssey* as female death-spirits who snatch people away, causing them to disappear in this mysterious fashion. In speaking in that poem of the long and unexplained absence of his father Odysseus, Telemachos remarks that he would not grieve as much if he knew that he had met with a glorious death in battle, 'but as it is, the Harpies have spirited him away leaving no report behind; he has gone out of sight, out of knowledge, and has left me nothing but anguish and tears'.¹⁰⁴ As when the swineherd Eumaios uses such language in reference to Odysseus later in the poem,¹⁰⁵ this is really just a manner of speaking, but it provides some idea nonetheless of how the Harpies were commonly imagined. They appear in similar guise in a more strictly mythical context in Penelope's account of the strange history of the daughters of Pandareos. Having been left as orphans after their parents were killed by the gods, so we are told, the girls benefitted from the favour of four great goddesses, for Aphrodite nourished them on cheese, honey, and wine, while Hera

made them lovely and wise beyond all other women, Artemis made them grow tall, and Athena taught them handicrafts; but as Aphrodite was travelling to Olympos to ask Zeus to arrange suitable marriages for them, the Harpies snatched them away and handed them over to the Erinyes (Furies) as servants.¹⁰⁶ Although no explanation is offered for this sad turn in their fortunes, Penelope's narrative tells us a great deal about how the Harpies were viewed in Homer's time, for she states initially that the girls were carried away by storm-winds (*thuellai*) and shortly afterwards that they were snatched away by *Harpuiiai*, as if that meant much the same. The Harpies are evidently visualized, then, as wind-spirits who can sweep people away, an idea reflected in their Hesiodic names, Aello (Stormwind) and Ocypete (Swiftfoot). Later authors add a third Harpy, Celaino (the Dark).¹⁰⁷

If the Harpies simply functioned as 'snatchers' who removed people from the company of the living and disappeared with them, they could hardly acquire any proper myths of their own; but in one story at least, they also appear as persecutors of the living. For in a well-known myth associated with the voyage of the Argonauts, they are said to have persecuted the Thracian seer-king Phineus by swooping down to snatch his food whenever he tried to eat, and by causing even the little that was left to reek of decay.¹⁰⁸ This feature of their activity is mentioned in tragedy¹⁰⁹ and was probably described in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*. They appear at their most unpleasant in this connection, as revolting creatures, which seem to be modelled on carrion-eating birds. For they are not only hideous and very greedy but are so filthy that they leave an intolerable stench behind and taint any food that they come into contact with. For the various stories that were offered to explain why Phineus came to be persecuted by them, and the story of how they were put to flight and perhaps even killed by two winged Argonauts, the Boreads, see p. 403. This is their only myth of the kind, apart from that of their brief persecution of Aeneas' crew in the *Aeneid* (see p. 529), a story that was clearly invented by Vergil himself on the basis of the Argonautic legend.¹¹⁰ According to the *Iliad*, Achilles' immortal horses Xanthos and Balios (Chestnut and Dapple) were conceived by the Harpy Podarge (Swiftfoot) to Zephyros, the West Wind, as she was grazing on a meadow by the streams of Ocean, presumably in the form of a mare.¹¹¹ Two ideas seem to be at work here: a male wind-god and female wind-spirit would make excellent parents for wind-swift horses; and an ancient folk-belief suggesting that mares could be impregnated by the wind, rather as in Homer's story.

The monstrous children and descendants of Phorcys and Ceto

PHORCYS, the last of the three sons of Pontos, resembled his brother Thaumas in having no myths or cult. The *Odyssey* applies the title of 'old man of the sea' to him, as to his brother Nereus, and he is of genealogical significance in the *Theogony* as the founder of a remarkable family of monsters,¹¹² which seems to take the form indicated in Table 3 (if two ambiguities in the text are rightly interpreted there). His wife and sister Ceto had an appropriate name accordingly in so far as *ketos* was a Greek term for a sea-monster,

The first children of Phorcys and Ceto were the Graiai and Gorgons, two groups

of sisters whose myths are intertwined. The name of the GRAIAI simply means ‘old women’. After initially describing them as ‘fair-cheeked’, which would imply that they were young and attractive, Hesiod explains their name by saying that they were grey-haired from birth.¹¹³ There is no suggestion as yet that the sisters were old and decrepit as is usually (though not invariably) the case in later accounts and portrayals. There are two of them here, the beautifully clad Pempredo and saffron-robed Enyo; but a third sister, Deino or Perso, is commonly added to the group in subsequent accounts.¹¹⁴ It came to be believed that they not only resembled very old women, but that the three of them possessed only a single eye and tooth between them, which they would pass from one to another so as to be able to see and eat. This feature of their legend is first reported by Pherecydes, who presumably found it in early epic.¹¹⁵ Pherecydes is also the first author to mention that Perseus visited them when setting off to fetch the head of their sister, the Gorgon Medusa; in the usual account, he had been told that they could reveal the way to some nymphs who would provide him with some equipment that he needed for his quest, and he forced the Graiai to disclose this information by stealing their eye and tooth and refusing to hand them back until they spoke (see further on pp. 226–7). Or, in an exceptional account by Aeschylus, the Graiai acted as sentries for the Gorgons, and Perseus hurled their single eye into Lake Tritonis in Libya to prevent them from warning their sisters of his approach.¹¹⁶

The GORGONS (Gorgones or Gorgous in Greek), who were three in number, were named Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa (properly Medousa in Greek). According to Hesiod, they lived beyond the outer Ocean towards the night, in the vicinity of the Hesperides (i.e. near the sunset in the far west);¹¹⁷ or in another early epic account from the *Cypria*, they lived in the midst of the Ocean on a rocky island called Sarpedon.¹¹⁸ It is commonly agreed in subsequent sources that they lived in or beyond the Ocean, though not always in the west.¹¹⁹ Aeschylus places them close to the Graiai, however, as we have seen, and indicates that both sets of sisters lived in the east in a place that was accessible by land.¹²⁰ Although Hesiod does not trouble to describe the Gorgons, they were consistently pictured as monsters of hideous aspect, so very hideous that the mere sight of them was sufficient to turn the beholder to stone. Their grinning heads were wreathed with snakes, and they had fearsome teeth, or even tusks like wild boars.

As Hesiod already mentions, Medusa was distinguished from her sisters by the fact that she alone was mortal, and it was for that reason that Perseus chose her as his victim when he was sent to fetch a Gorgon’s head (see p. 226).¹²¹ Hesiod has occasion to refer to this episode in the *Theogony* because, in the oddest of ways, it is of genealogical significance. For Medusa was pregnant at the time of her death, having previously slept with Poseidon in a soft meadow among spring flowers, and her unborn children, CHRYSAOR and PEGASOS, sprang from her neck when Perseus cut off her head.¹²² The poet remarks that Chrysaor bore that name because he held a golden sword (*chryseion aor*) in his hands, but reveals nothing further about him except that he was the father of Geryoneus (see p. 55);¹²³ and later sources are no more informative. The visual evidence, which is also very limited, suggests that Chrysaor was not monstrous in form like so many members of this family. Pegasus

appears prominently in myth by contrast, as the winged horse that carried Bellerophon through the air and helped him to perform his feats (see p. 221ff). Hesiod already refers to the way in which the two of them worked together to kill the monstrous Chimaira.¹²⁴

Although Homer makes no reference to the story of Perseus and Medusa, he does mention that ‘the head of that terrible monster, the Gorgon, a thing of fright and terror’, was attached to Athena’s aegis¹²⁵ (see p. 76); and it is at least possible that it was already accepted in Homer’s time that she had acquired it from Perseus, as is reported by later authors from Pherecydes onwards (see p. 228).¹²⁶ Homer also refers to the Gorgon’s head as an ornament on human armour; the crowning feature of Agamemnon’s shield, for instance, is a Gorgon’s head, which glares from it in a horrifying manner, with representations of Deimos and Phobos (Terror and Fear) on either side.¹²⁷ As images that were not only fearsome to behold but might also be credited with magical powers (e.g. for repelling harm and danger), such images were carved on breastplates and shields in historical times, and also on walls and gates. Portrayals from early Greek art accord well with the Homeric passages, showing a horrible grinning head with a flat nose, lolling tongue, and staring eyes. It seems likely that the Gorgon’s head or *gorgoneion* originated as an apotropaic image, existing independently as such before it was turned into a complete monster and thence into a trio of monsters (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4. The Gorgon Medusa, from a vase, sixth century BC. © Science History Images/Alamy Stock Photo.

To explain why Poseidon should have wished to sleep with Medusa, it sometimes came to be suggested that she had been exceptionally beautiful until she came to be transformed into the familiar monster. According to Ovid she was lovely in every respect, and especially for her hair, until Poseidon seduced her in a temple of Athena, to the great anger of the virgin goddess, who then transformed her hair into coils of snakes.¹²⁸ Or, in another story of the kind, Athena apparently took this action after Medusa angered her by claiming to rival her in beauty. It is appropriate in any case that Athena should have been the deity who transformed her because she wore Medusa's head on her aegis.¹²⁹ Irrespective of such stories, the Gorgon's head came to be portrayed in less monstrous form in artistic images from the fifth century BC onwards, in which she is often depicted as calmly and coldly beautiful, or, from about 300 BC, in pathetic mode with a look of horror or pain about her eyes.

Medusa's head, or even her hair and blood, retained an extraordinary potency

after her death. There are various tales in which Perseus is said to have made use of her head to turn his enemies to stone (see pp. 227–8); Heracles gave a lock of her hair to Sterope, daughter of Cepheus, to protect the Arcadian city of Tegea (see p. 264); Athena collected some of her blood and gave it to Asclepius, who used blood from the left side of her body to put people to death, and blood from the right side to cure people or even raise them from the dead (see p. 54); or in Euripides' *Ion*, Athena is said to have given Erichthonios, king of Athens, a phial containing two drops of the Gorgon's blood, one of which was a deadly poison and the other a cure for disease.¹³⁰ The people of Argos claimed that the Gorgon's head was buried under a mound in their marketplace, where it doubtless served a useful function in averting harm.¹³¹

Chrysaor, the strangely born son of Medusa, mated with the Oceanid Callirhoe to father a son of his own, GERYONEUS (or Geryones, or Geryon).¹³² Although Hesiod merely describes him as three-headed, later accounts and images present him as being triple-bodied, with three upper bodies joined together at the waist, and either one pair of legs or three. It was sometimes supposed that he had wings too.¹³³ He lived in the outer Ocean in the remote west on the mythical island of Erytheia ('the Red Island', a suitable name for a place that lay close to the sunset); and he owned large herds of cattle, which were tended by a herdsman called Eurytion and were guarded by the dog Orthos or Orthros (see p. 251). When the Greeks came to know of Iberia, they came to suppose that Erytheia lay somewhere off its coast, sometimes identifying it with Gadeira (Cadiz, then not attached to the mainland) or another island of the area.¹³⁴ Or, Geryoneus' home was located somewhere in Ambracia in north-western Greece, according to an alternative account¹³⁵ (possibly of ancient origin if it dates back to the days when this could have been viewed as a remote area that lay somewhere near the sunset). Living too far away to interact with mortals in any normal circumstances, Geryoneus was introduced into myth to provide a fearsome opponent for Heracles when he ventured beyond the bounds within which mortals are normally confined, and Hesiod refers to the story of their encounter in a way that indicates that it was already familiar, remarking that the hero killed Geryon along with his herdsman and dog in order to steal his cattle, see further on p. 251.¹³⁶

The next child of Phorcys and Ceto was ECHIDNA ('Snake-woman'), who was formed like a beautiful woman in the upper half of her body, and otherwise like a terrible snake with speckled skin. The gods granted her a cave for a home, deep under the earth in the land of the Arimoi (probably somewhere in Asia Minor, see p. 80), where she lived far away from gods and mortals alike, feeding on raw meat.¹³⁷ As might be inferred from Hesiod's account of her, she had little occasion to appear in mythical tales. At the most, Apollodorus records a strange tale from the Argolid in which Argos Panoptes (see p. 214) is said to have killed her in her sleep; she is described here as a daughter of Tartaros and Gaia, who used to prey on passers-by.¹³⁸

By mating with Typhon, a monster no less terrible than herself, Echidna founded a family of monstrous beasts. The three who were certainly children of her own (for there are ambiguities in Hesiod's text) are Orthos, Cerberos, and the Lernaian

hydra.¹³⁹ **Orthos** (or Orthros), who has already been mentioned as Geryoneus' watchdog who was finally killed by Heracles, could be conveniently inserted into the genealogies at this point. Although nothing is stated in the *Theogony* about his appearance, he was evidently no ordinary dog, and in artistic images he is quite often portrayed with two heads. His brother **Cerberos**, the hound of Hades, is often said to have had many more than that, 50 in Hesiod's account, or no less than a hundred according to Pindar and some later authors.¹⁴⁰ In works of art, however, for practical reasons, he is typically shown with three (or less commonly two), and many authors from the Attic tragedians onwards describe him as three-headed accordingly.¹⁴¹ He usually has a snake for a tail, and may have serpents springing from other parts of his body also. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* both allude to him, though not by name and without a description, mentioning that Heracles once brought him up from the Underworld (as his penultimate or final labour, see p. 254).¹⁴² In contrast to the other monsters in this group, he made a valuable contribution to the ordering of the world by ensuring that the dead remained enclosed in the Underworld (see p. 100), and Heracles was thus obliged to set him free afterwards to allow him to return to his duties. The third child of Echidna and Typhon was the **Lernaian hydra**, which was reared by Hera in the marshes of Lerna in the Argolid to be a danger to Heracles.¹⁴³ Although Hesiod says nothing about its appearance, it was a huge snake (*hydra* simply means water snake in Greek), which was particularly dangerous in the usual tradition because of its many heads. Heracles killed it nevertheless as one of his labours, with a little help from his nephew Iolaos (see p. 254).

The next monster in the family of Echidna is the **Chimaira**. It is not clear from Hesiod's language whether she was another child of Echidna or, as is perhaps more likely, offspring of the hydra. She was a composite being of improbable design who was formed like a huge lion with the head of a goat (*chimaira*) springing from her back, and with a snake for a tail.¹⁴⁴ Since her tail was tipped with a snake's head, she had three heads overall. She lived in Lycia in Asia Minor until she was killed by Bellerophon (see p. 221). The dog Orthos mated with the Chimaira (or conceivably with his mother Echidna) to produce the last two members of the family, the Theban Phix, or **Sphinx** as she is more commonly known, and the **Nemean lion**.¹⁴⁵ The Sphinx was a monster of a familiar Near Eastern type with the body of a lion, the head of a woman, and wings. She persecuted the people of Thebes until Oedipus killed her or caused her to take her own life (see further on pp. 243ff.). As in the case of the Lernaian hydra, the Nemean lion was raised by Hera in the Argolid to provide a dangerous adversary for Heracles, who killed it as his first labour (see p. 243). Although it was doubtless very large and fierce, its only really exceptional feature was its impenetrable hide, which is first mentioned by Pindar and Bacchylides.¹⁴⁶ So, in sum, Echidna's branch of the family was devised to account for the origin of some well-known monstrous beasts that were killed by Heracles and other famous heroes. In the form of some of these monsters, we may recognize the influence of non-Greek, chiefly Near Eastern, fancy on the Greek mind.

The last of the offspring of Phorcys and Ceto, after Echidna, was the huge snake that guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides (see p. 255). Although nameless in

the early tradition, it was sometimes called Ladon in Hellenistic and later times.¹⁴⁷ Heracles was sent to fetch some of its apples as his final or penultimate labour, and he doubtless killed the snake while doing so in the original story, although it is left unharmed in other accounts, see further on p. 257.

Phorcys ‘who rules over the barren sea’ is mentioned in the *Odyssey* as the father of another child, the sea-nymph Thoosa, who bore the Cyclops Polyphemos to Poseidon;¹⁴⁸ and, in the later tradition, another monster came to be added to his progeny, for the sea-monster Scylla, who presented such a threat to the Argonauts and to Odysseus (see pp. 409 and 509), was usually classed as a daughter of his from the classical period onwards. She was said to have been borne to him either by Hecate or by a certain Crataeis (who is named as her mother in the *Odyssey*).¹⁴⁹ According to a Hellenistic tale, Phorcys applied burning torches to Scylla’s body to bring her back to life again after Heracles killed her for stealing some of the cattle of Geryoneus.¹⁵⁰

The family of Night

After bearing her two radiant children Aither and Day to her brother Erebus, to bring the light of day into the world, Night generated many more children from herself, all associated with the dark in one way or another. In modern terms many of them might be described as abstractions, but Hesiod and his contemporaries would have viewed them from a different perspective, regarding them as dark and negative forces that exercise a real power in the world, as in a sense they most certainly do. They could thus also be regarded as divinities of a kind, even in the case of those that are barely personified.

Death, Sleep, and other personifications

Since the worst of all negative forces is death, which annuls our very existence, it is no surprise that Hesiod’s list of these children of Night should begin with hateful **Moros** (Fate, especially with regard to the time of our death), black **Ker** (Doom) and **Thanatos** (Death personified). Then comes **Hypnos** (Sleep), who was traditionally regarded as a brother of Death, as a privative force of a different but related kind, who robs us of all awareness and animation at night, at least in so far as we are not troubled by **Oneiroi** (Dreams), the illusory night-visions that disturb our sleep.¹⁵¹

Whether as personified agents or simply as concepts, SLEEP and DEATH were always closely associated in the Greek mind. They reappear in a later passage in the *Theogony*, which states that they have neighbouring homes in a dark and gloomy place at the ends of the earth, near the home of their mother Night.¹⁵² We are told that they are of opposite character even if their mode of action is comparable; for Sleep ‘roams peacefully over the earth and is kindly to mortals’ while Death ‘has a heart of iron, a heart within his breast of pitiless bronze, and keeps a firm grip on any mortal once he catches hold of him; and he is hateful even to the immortal gods’.¹⁵³ In the *Iliad*, which describes the pair as twins without saying anything about their parentage, they raise the corpse of Sarpedon from the battlefield at Troy

at the order of that hero's father Zeus to carry it home to Lycia.¹⁵⁴ This episode inspired some memorable vase-paintings, which typically show the brothers as winged and dressed in full armour. Elsewhere in the *Iliad*, Hera visits Sleep on Lemnos to ask him to lull her husband to sleep after she has made love with him, to distract him while some of his orders are being disobeyed; but the godling is initially reluctant, saying that Zeus had been furiously angry when he had performed this service for her on a previous occasion, and would have hurled him out of heaven into the sea if he had not taken refuge with Night. Hera wins him round, however, by promising to give him Pasithea, one of the Charites (Graces), as a bride.¹⁵⁵ Sleep acquired no further myths in the subsequent tradition apart from one that linked him to Endymion, an Eleian hero who was supposed to have sunk into an everlasting sleep (see p. 381); for according to the Hellenistic poet Licymnios, Sleep, who was presumably responsible for ensuring that he remained asleep, caused him to sleep with his eyes open so as to be able to enjoy the sight of their beauty.¹⁵⁶ Some late authors diverted themselves by painting poetic pictures of his realm. Ovid thus portrays him as sleeping on an ebony couch in a dark cave in the land of the Cimmerians, with his countless sons, the Dreams, lying around him on all sides, as the stream of Lethe (Oblivion) glides out from the bottom of the cave, murmuring over its gravelly bed to induce slumber, and poppies bloom outside surrounded by all kinds soporific herbs.¹⁵⁷

As for Death, there could be little role for him in serious myth because Hermes was thought to conduct the dead to the Underworld and Hades presided over them after they arrived there. In the two memorable myths in which he does arrive to haul mortals away to the world below merely to meet with humiliation, he is very much a figure from folklore. When Death arrived at Corinth to fetch Sisyphos, the cunning hero managed to defer his death for a while at least by tying him up (see further on p. 553);¹⁵⁸ and in Euripides' version of the story of Alcestis, Heracles lay in wait for Death when he was due to fetch her from her tomb, and wrestled her away from him to return her to her husband (see p. 146).¹⁵⁹

The next children of Night in the list are **Momos** (Blame or Censure) and **Oizus** (Pain).¹⁶⁰ As a personification of fault-finding, MOMOS makes some appearance in fable and myth as a sort of licensed jester who carps at the works and deeds of the gods. He makes one intercession of real importance in a myth from early epic, in connection with the origins of the Trojan War; for when Earth once complained that she was being weighed down by the countless multitudes of impious mortals who were swarming over her surface, Momos found fault with the plans that Zeus developed to resolve the problem, and proposed instead that it would be better to provoke a great war between Europe and Asia, see further on p. 454.¹⁶¹ At a less serious level, he figures in an Aesopic fable in which Zeus, Prometheus, and Athena invite him to judge their handiwork, a bull, a man, and a house respectively. He finds fault with the bull, saying that its eyes should have been placed on its horns to enable it to see what it is attacking; he finds fault with the man, saying that his mind should have been placed on the outside of his body to make his bad qualities visible to all; and he finds fault with the house too, saying that it should have been mounted on wheels to enable people to move if they should acquire bad neighbours; but this

is all too much for Zeus, who is so infuriated by his carping that he banishes him from Olympus forever.¹⁶² Momos' criticism of the bull is already mentioned by Aristotle, though in a somewhat different form.¹⁶³ According to another tale, Momos was dismayed to find that Aphrodite was so very beautiful that he could find nothing at all to criticize in her, and salvaged his honour as best he could by making fun of her sandals.¹⁶⁴

The Hesperides and the Moirai or Fates

We arrive next at some more substantial figures, the **Hesperides**, a group of nymphs who lived at the westernmost edges of the earth, and the **Moirai** (Fates) and **Keres** (Dooms or death-spirits).¹⁶⁵ The Moirai and Keres correspond to the above-mentioned Moros and Ker, as the goddesses who appoint a person's death or doom, but the Moirai in particular are visualized more clearly as personal beings in so far as they perform their function as a group.

Although the HESPERIDES or 'Daughters of Evening' were lovely nymphs who caused no real harm to anyone, they are included among the children of Night because they lived near the sunset, and close to the realm of darkness that lay beyond. They had been stationed there in the garden of the gods to watch over a wondrous tree (or trees) that bore golden apples, and they were aided in their task by a fearsome snake, born to Phorcys and Ceto (see p. 57), which provided a more effective deterrent to any prospective thief.¹⁶⁶ Their duties were none too strenuous in any case, because the garden lay at such a remote distance that no one ever attempted to steal the apples until Heracles was sent to fetch some as one of his labours (see p. 255); in connection with that labour, as we will see, the garden and those who lived there were sometimes relocated to the remote north. The Hesperides were famous for their beautiful voices and would doubtless have entertained themselves by singing and dancing as was customary for nymphs. There were usually thought to be three of them, although they vary in number from two to seven, and they are generally named as Hespere (or Hesperie, or Hesperathousa) and Erytheia (or Erytheis), and Aigle,¹⁶⁷ in reference to the evening, the red of the evening sky, and the brightness of day respectively.

The MOIRAI or FATES were a group of goddesses who assigned individual destinies to mortals at birth, particularly with regard to the timing of their death. The word *moira* means 'portion' or 'allotment' and could be used accordingly as a term for a portion of land, or a person's portion at a meal, or the share that is allotted to a man when spoils are being divided. By a natural extension, the word could be applied to describe the lot or fate that is apportioned to a person in life; and the awesome power that apportions our fates could thus be personified as Moira (Fate or Necessity), or as this trio of Moirai or 'Apportioners'.

These Moirai are initially classed in the *Theogony* as children of Night, in accordance with their nature as appointers of death, but are later reclassified in a part of the poem that was added after Hesiod's time, now being described as daughters of Zeus and Themis (Law or Right Order)¹⁶⁸ because they contribute to the proper ordering of the world under the authority of Zeus (see p. 74). It would

seem that they originated not as abstract powers of destiny but as birth-spirits, much like the ones who in the modern folklore of the area visit new-born children and determine what their portion in life shall be. The famous myth in which the Moirai appear after the birth of Meleager to foretell what his lot shall be, and also to specify a condition for his death (see p. 283), was surely rooted in very ancient folklore. In their capacity as goddesses who appoint the fate of mortals, they were objects of cult in many parts of the Greek world, as inscriptions and monuments abundantly testify. They do not appear at all frequently in myth however. Although one or all of them may be portrayed as attending the births of gods or mortals, they have little occasion to make any specific intervention in mythical tales unless they want to reveal some feature of a person's fate, as in the case of Meleager, or else are required to take action when a person's fate needs to be altered in some way. One of the Moirai, Clotho, is thus presented by Pindar as superintending the revival of Pelops when he is brought to life again after being killed by his father¹⁶⁹ (see p. 420 for the circumstances); and in a tale from Aeschylus, Apollo is said to have made the sisters drunk in order to persuade them to allow a substitute to die in place of Admetos (see p. 146).¹⁷⁰ Apollodorus reports that they helped Zeus to quell two major revolts by tricking Typhon into eating some fruits that would gravely weaken him (see p. 80) and by clubbing two Giants to death with bronze cudgels during the war between the gods and the Giants.¹⁷¹

The Moirai are regularly represented as spinners from the earliest times. Although Homer makes only a single reference to the Moirai in the plural (in remarking that they have given an enduring heart to man), he speaks of the thread that is spun by Moira for Hector at the time of his birth; and the *klōthes* (spinners) who are mentioned in the *Odyssey* as spinning people's fates at the time of their birth may surely be identified with the Moirai.¹⁷² Hesiod and later authors report that there are three Moirai named Clotho (the Spinner), Lachesis (the Apportioner), and Atropos (the Inflexible);¹⁷³ in their rare appearances in art, they are shown as handsome women, and they may be imagined in literature as being very old. The thread that they spin represents or carries the destiny of each successive individual, and when it is broken, a life is brought to an end. Later poetical imagination elaborated this imagery in various ways, making the Fates spin a gold thread, for example, when spinning the fate of a particularly fortunate individual, or resume an abandoned task when someone is recalled to life.¹⁷⁴ Their Hesiodic names might already suggest a division of labour, with Clotho spinning the thread, Lachesis determining its allotted length in her nature as apportioner, and the inexorable Atropos cutting it off at the time of a person's death.¹⁷⁵ Or, Atropos may have the past as her province, since it is unalterable, while Lachesis is concerned with the future, and Clotho presides over the present, spinning each person's specific destiny.¹⁷⁶

Their sisters the KERES, who were death-spirits in a narrower sense, are occasionally mentioned in the Homeric epics as bearing people away to death, but that is really little more than a manner of speaking, and they rarely appear in subsequent mythical narratives, although they may be shown in vase-paintings as small winged figures who are present at death-scenes.



Figure 3.5. Heracles and a Ker. Drawing after an Attic vase.

More personifications, and Eris (Strife) and her self-generated children

The last group of beings in Hesiod's list of the children of Night represent various other negative features of human life, namely **Nemesis** (Retribution), **Apate** (Deceit), **Philotes**, **Geras** (Old Age), and hard-hearted **Eris** (Strife).¹⁷⁷ Philotes, whose name means friendship or love, is a perhaps rather unexpected member of the group; in the present context she evidently represents pleasure of love or sex, and finds a place here in so far as such pleasure is associated with the dark and all too often with guile or deceit. As for GERAS, who leads us towards death, he is occasionally shown in the company of Heracles in vase-paintings, as a bent and emaciated old man; but the hero confronts him confidently enough, even threatening him with his club, as befits someone who is destined to escape old age and death by achieving divine status. NEMESIS, the personification of retribution and righteous indignation, was honoured in cult at Rhamnous in Attica as well as at Smyrna and other Ionian cities, and was said to have been the mother of Helen of Troy in one

tradition at least; for according to a tale from early epic, she conceived Helen to Zeus when the two of them mated in bird-form, see further on pp. 451–2.

ERIS or STRIFE, the last-born child of Night, added a further branch to the family by generating a series of children of her own, representing many of the harmful and destructive things that can arise from conflict and discord, namely Toil (Ponos), Oblivion (Lethe), Famine, Sorrows, Fights, Battles, Murders, Manslayings, Quarrels, Lies, Disputes, Lawlessness, Delusion (Ate), and Oath (Horcus).¹⁷⁸ This is allegory of the most obvious kind for the most part; the last two children alone require further comment.

ATE represents the delusion or clouding of the mind that leads people to commit acts of ill-considered folly. There is a striking portrayal of her mode of action in the nineteenth book of the *Iliad*, when Agamemnon tries to excuse himself for having robbed Achilles of his prize of war, Briseis (see p. 473), by claiming that he had been deluded by Ate who blinds all men, an accursed being ‘who has delicate feet, for it is not on the ground that she walks, no, she tramples over the heads of men, bringing harm to mankind and ensnaring one or another’.¹⁷⁹ Agamemnon goes on to say that even Zeus himself had once been deluded by Ate, when Hera had tricked him into swearing an oath that would enable her to ensure that the inheritance that he had intended for his son Heracles would go to another man (see p. 237). Zeus had been so angry to discover how he had been deluded that he had seized Ate by her hair and had hurled her down to the earth, where she now works her mischief on mortals.¹⁸⁰ According to Apollodorus, she fell to earth on the hill of Ate in the Troad, on the spot where Ilos would later found the city of Troy (see p. 442).¹⁸¹ HORCOS (Oath) is included among the children of Eris in so far as he is connected with perjuries, for he personifies the curse that will be activated if a person swears a false oath. Hesiod expresses the matter in allegorical terms in the *Works and Days*, by stating that the Erinyes (Furies) assisted at the birth of Horcos when Eris brought him to birth to bring trouble to those who perjure themselves.¹⁸²

Eris herself has only a single proper myth, but one of some importance, which tells how she stirred up the quarrel between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite that would be settled through the judgement of Paris, and so helped to set in course the train of events that led to the outbreak of the Trojan War (see further on p. 454).¹⁸³ As in the case of the interrelated story of Momos mentioned above, and also the story of Zeus’s pursuit of Nemesis, which resulted in the conception of Helen, this myth can be traced back to the *Cypria*, the first epic in the Trojan cycle; it would seem that the author of this poem liked to assign a more solid role to personifications of this kind than was usual in high literature. Homer refers to Eris in the *Iliad* along with other minor deities and personifications who stir up frenzy on the battlefield; at the beginning of the eleventh book, Zeus sends him down to inspire the Greeks with ardour for battle, which he achieves by standing in the middle of their camp and uttering a terrible piercing cry.¹⁸⁴

Notes

- 2 Ibid. 411–52.
- 3 *Hom. Hymn. Demeter* 24–5, 52–9, 438–40.
- 4 E.g. Eur. *Helen* 569–70, *Ion* 1048–50, Soph. fr. 492 Nauck, Arist. fr. 500, 501 Kock.
- 5 See e.g. Arist. *Wealth* 595 with schol. 594.
- 6 Eur. *Med.* 259ff., cf. A.R. 3.251–2, 477–80, 528–30, etc.; Theoc. 210–16.
- 7 Schol. A.R. 1.544.
- 8 Hes. *Theog.* 133.
- 9 *Hom. Il.* 14.197–204; Pher. 3F18a.
- 10 Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 286ff.
- 11 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.1.
- 12 Hes. *Theog.* 337–70; Oceanids look after young, 347.
- 13 Hes. *Theog.* 361.
- 14 Ibid. 383–5.
- 15 Ibid. 386–403.
- 16 Ibid. 782–806.
- 17 Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 1ff.
- 18 E.g. D.S. 5.23.3, Hyg. *Fab.* 154; already implied Eur. *Hippol.* 735–41.
- 19 Hdt. 3.115.
- 20 Aratus 360.
- 21 Ov. *Met.* 8.576–89.
- 22 Ibid. 8.590–610.
- 23 Moschus 6, Verg. *Aen.* 3.694–6; early allusions, Ibycus 42, Pi. *Nem.* 1.1–2.
- 24 Ov. *Met.* 5.572–641.
- 25 Paus. 5.7.2–3.
- 26 *Hom. Il.* 22.147–52 (two springs), 20.73–4 (two names).
- 27 Ibid. 21.130–2.
- 28 Ibid. 21.209–382.
- 29 E.g. Apollod. 3.12.1–2.
- 30 Hes. *Theog.* 371–4.
- 31 Pi. *Ol.* 7.54–76.
- 32 Eur. *Phaethon* fr. 781.10–12 Nauck, cf. Eratosth. 24 (citing Aeschylus, but the part of the story in which the two gods are identified may have been drawn from elsewhere). For the radiance of Apollo, e.g. *Hom. Hymn. Apollo* 440–7.
- 33 E.g. *Hom. Hymn* 31 to *Helios* (across sky on chariot, etc.), Eur. *Ion* 82 (four-horse chariot), 122 (wings), Ov. *Met.* 2.153–4 and Hyg. *Fab.* 183 (names of horses), Eur. fr. 779.8 Nauck (riding on horseback).
- 34 *Hom. Il.* 8.485 (plunges into Ocean), Aesch. fr. 186 Nauck (washes self and horses in western sea after journey); for the cup of the sun, see Athen. 11.469d ff, citing a string of poets from Stesichorus (= 185) and Mimnermus (= 12) onwards.
- 35 *Hom. Od.* 12.127–41, 260–425.
- 36 Ibid. 8.267–71, *Hom. Hymn. Demeter* 62–81.
- 37 Pasiphae, first Isocr. *Helen* 27; Aloeus, Eumelos fr. 3 Bernabe.
- 38 *Hom. Od.* 12.132–8, schol. *Od.* 17.208.
- 39 Eur. fr. 771 Nauck, Ov. *Met.* 1.750ff.
- 40 Hes. fr. 311 (= Hyg. *Fab.* 154).
- 41 Eur. fr. 779 Nauck.
- 42 D.S. 5.23–3–4, Hyg. *Fab.* 154, Ov. L.c.
- 43 Ov. *Met.* 1.750–2.324, cf. Eur. *Phaethon* fr., Lucret. 5.396–405, Hyg. *Fab.* 154.
- 44 Hyg. *Fab.* 152A.
- 45 Hes. fr. 311, Aesch. fr. 68–73 Nauck, A.R. 4.598ff., D.S. 5.23.2, Ov. *Met.* 2.340–66.
- 46 Hyg. *Fab.* 152A.
- 47 Ibid. 154, Ov. *Met.* 2.367–80, Verg. *Aen.* 10.189–93.
- 48 Ov. *Met.* 4.190–270, Westermann, anon., p. 348.
- 49 The artistic record is more helpful on these matters than the literary record, but see for instance Pi. *Ol.* 3.19–20, Ov. *Fast.* 4.374, Serv. *Aen.* 5.721.
- 50 *Hom. Hymn.* 32 to *Selene* (bore Pandeia to Zeus, 14–6).
- 51 Verg. *Georg.* 3.191–3, with Serv. ad loc. referring to Nicander.
- 52 *Hom. Hymn. Hermes* 99–100.
- 53 Aesch. fr. 170 Nauck.

- 54 Theoc. 2.10–1, etc.
- 55 *Hom. Hymn. Hermes* 99–100.
- 56 *Hom. Hymn. 21 to Helios* 4–7.
- 57 *Eur. Phoen.* 175 with schol., schol. *Arat.* 445.
- 58 Alcman 57.
- 59 E.g. *Hom. Od.* 2.1 and *Il.* 19.1 respectively.
- 60 *Hom. Il.* 11.1–2, *Od.* 5.1–2.
- 61 *Hom. Il.* 11.1–2, *Od.* 5.1–2.
- 62 Hellenic. 4F140, schol. *Lyc.* 18, *Serv. Georg.* 3.328.
- 63 *Hom. Il.* 3.150–3.
- 64 *Schol. Il.* 11.1.
- 65 *Hes. Theog.* 984–5.
- 66 *Hom. Od.* 5.121–4.
- 67 *Ibid.* 15.249–51.
- 68 *Hes. Theog.* 986–91.
- 69 *Apollod.* 1.4.4.
- 70 *Hes. Theog.* 378–82.
- 71 *Hom. Il.* 23.193–218.
- 72 *Aiolos*, *Hom. Od.* 10.21.8.
- 73 *Hes. Theog.* 375–7.
- 74 *Ibid.* 507–12.
- 75 *Ibid.* 514–6.
- 76 *Apollod.* 1.2.3.
- 77 E.g. *Hyg. Fab.* 150.
- 78 *Hes. Theog.* 517–20, *Hom. Od.* 1.52–4.
- 79 *Paus.* 5.11.5, 5.18.4.
- 80 *Hdt.* 4.184.
- 81 *Hes. fr.* 169.
- 82 *Hes. Theog.* 233–9.
- 83 *Ibid.* 234–6.
- 84 Nereus as old man of sea, *Hom. Od.* 24.58, cf. *Il.* 1.358, 18.36, etc.; Proteus, *Od.* 4.365; Phorcys, *Od.* 13.96, 345
- 85 *Pher.* 3F16, *Apollod.* 2.5.11.
- 86 Panyasis fr. 7A Davies (from *Athen.* 11.469d).
- 87 *Horace Odes* 1.15.
- 88 *Ael. N.A.* 14.28, *Lucian Tragodop.* 87.
- 89 *Hes. Theog.* 240–64.
- 90 *Hom. Il.* 18.36–8, 49–50 (with father in cave under sea), *Hdt.* 7.191 (Persians offer sacrifice to them), *Eur. Ion* 1078–86 (out of sea to dance), *Iph. Taur.* 427–9, *Iph. Aul.* 1054–7; *Ov. Met.* 2.11–4 (habits as portrayed in imaginary work of art); *Theoc.* 7.59–60 (with halcyons in waves).
- 91 *Philoxenus Kyklops* fr. 815–24 *PMG*.
- 92 *Theoc.* 11.11ff.
- 93 *Ov. Met.* 13.750–897, cf. *Sil. Ital.* 14.221ff., *Serv. Ecl.* 7.37, 9.39.
- 94 *Et. Magn. s.v. Galatia* (citing *Timaeus*), *D.S.* 5.24
- 95 *Ael. N.A.* 14.28.
- 96 *Hes. Theog.* 265–9.
- 97 *Hom. Il.* 11.27–28.
- 98 *Call. Hymn* 4.228–39.
- 99 For Zeus, *Hom. Il.* 2.786ff., 8.397ff., 11.185ff., 15.143ff., 24.74ff., 143ff.; for Hera, 18.166ff.; summons winds, 23.198ff., also acts on own initiative, 3.121ff., 5.353ff.; golden-winged, 8.398, 11.185.
- 100 *Proclus on Cypria*; for other early appearances, see *Hom. Hymn. Demeter* 314ff., *Hom. Hymn. Apollo* 102ff.
- 101 *A.R.* 2.284–300.
- 102 Cited by *Athenaeus*, 14.645b.
- 103 *Hes. Theog.* 268.
- 104 *Hom. Od.* 1.241–3.
- 105 *Ibid.* 14.371.
- 106 *Ibid.* 20.63–78.

- 107 Hes. *Theog.* 267, cf. Apollod. 1.9.21 (gives variants); Celaino added, e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 3.211, Hyg. *Fab.* 14.
108 A.R. 2.188–93, cf. Apollod. 1.9.21, Hyg. *Fab.* 14, 18.
109 Aesch. *Eum* 50–1.
110 Verg. *Aen.* 3.210–62.
111 Hom. *Il.* 16.148–51.
112 Suid. s.v. Kyllaros citing Stesichorus; Schol. *Il.* 23.346, Q.S. 4.569–70.
113 Hes. *Theog.* 270–336.
114 Ibid. 270–1.
115 Ibid. 273, cf. Pher. 3F11 and Apollod. 2.4.2 (Deino added), Heraclit. *de Incred.* 13 (Perso).
116 Pher. 3F11.
117 Aesch. *Phorkides* fr., cf. *Prom. Bound* 792–800 (single eye and tooth, live near Gorgons).
118 Hes. *Theog.* 274–8.
119 *Cypria* fr. 26 Davies.
120 E.g. Pher. 3F11, Apollod. 2.4.2, schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 10.72b.
121 Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 788ff.
122 Hes. *Theog.* 276–7, cf. Pher. 3F11 (Hermes and Athena point her out to Perseus as the only mortal Gorgon), Apollod. 2.4.2.
123 Hes. *Theog.* 276–83.
124 Ibid. 325.
125 Hom. *Il.* 5.738–42, 11.32–7.
126 Pher. 3F11, Apollod. 2.4.3.
127 Hom. *Il.* 11.36–7.
128 Ov. *Met.* 4.790–803.
129 Apollod. 2.4.3.
130 Eur. *Ion* 999–1005.
131 Paus. 2.21.6
132 Hes. *Theog.* 287–8.
133 E.g. Stes. 186 (six-armed, six-legged, and winged), Aesch. *Ag.* 870 and Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 423–4 (triple-bodied), Apollod. 2.5.10 (three bodies joined together at waist).
134 Hdt. 4.8, Str. 3.2.11, 3.5.4, Apollod. 2.5.10, Pliny *N.H.* 4.120.
135 Hecat. 1F26.
136 Hes. *Theog.* 289–94.
137 Hes. *Theog.* 295–305.
138 Apollod. 2.1.2.
139 Hes. *Theog.* 306–18.
140 Fifty heads, Hes. *Theog.* 312, Simon. 569; a hundred, Pi. fr. 249a SM, Horace *Odes* 2.13.34; nine, Alcaeus 443.
141 Soph. *Trach.* 1098, Eur. *Madness of Heracles*, 611, Apollod. 2.5.2, Verg. *Aen.* 6.417–8, Hyg. *Fab.* 15, etc.
142 Hom. *Il.* 8.367–8, *Od.* 11.623–6.
143 Hes. *Theog.* 313–5.
144 Ibid. 319–25, cf. Homer's description in *Il.* 6.179–82, and Apollod. 2.3.1.
145 Hes. *Theog.* 326–32.
146 Pi. *Isth.* 6.47–8, Bacch. 13.46–54.
147 Hes. *Theog.* 333–6; first called Ladon, A.R. 4.1396; hundred-headed according to Pher. 3F16b, cf. Apollod. 2.5.11
148 Hom. *Od.* 1.70–3.
149 By Hekate, e.g. Acus. 2F42, A.R. 4.828–9; by Crataiis, Apollod. *Epit.* 7.20.
150 Lyc. 44–8 and schol.
151 Hes. *Theog.* 211–12.
152 Ibid. 758–61.
153 Ibid. 762–6.
154 Hom. *Il.* 16.666–83.
155 Hom. *Il.* 14.229–91.
156 Licymnius 771 *PMG*, Diogenian. 4.60.
157 Ov. *Met.* 11.592ff., cf. Stat. *Theb.* 10.76ff.
158 Pher. 3F119.
159 Eur. *Alc.* 1139–42.

- 160 Hes. *Theog.* 214.
161 *Cypria* fr. 1 Davies.
162 Aesop fable 124 Chambry, cf. Babrius 59, Lucian *D.D.* 28.2, *Nigrinus* 32.
163 Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 3.2.
164 Aristid. *Orat.* 28.136.
165 Hes. *Theog.* 215–22.
166 Hes. *Theog.* 215–6 (Hesperides), 334–5 (snake), Eur. *Hippol.* 742–3, *Madness of Heracles* 394–9, A.R. 4.1396–9 (snake first named as Ladon) with schol. *Ibid.*, Apollod. 2.5.11, etc.
167 A.R. 4.1427–8, Apollod. 2.5.11, Hes. fr. 360 (*dub.*).
168 Hes. *Theog.* 217 and 903 respectively.
169 Pi. *Ol.* 1.26–7.
170 Aesch. *Eum.* 723–8.
171 Apollod. 1.6.2, 1.6.3.
172 Hom. *Il.* 24.49, 24.209–10 (cf. 20.127–8), *Od.* 7.197–8.
173 Hes. *Theog.* 905, *Shield* 258–60, Apollod. 1.3.1, etc.
174 Seneca *Apocol.* 4 (thread turned to gold as Nero's fate is being spun), Stat. *Theb.* 8.59, *iterataque pensa Sororum* (on Eurydice being restored to Orpheus).
175 Isidorus *Etymologiae* 8.11.93, cf. Anth. Latin. 792 Riese (*tres sunt fatales quae ducunt fila sorores;/Clotho baiulat, Lachesis trahit, Atropos occat*).
176 Ps.Aristotle *On the Universe* 7.401b18ff.
177 Hes. *Theog.* 224–5.
178 *Ibid.* 226–32.
179 Hom. *Il.* 19.91–4, cf. Pl. *Symp.* 195de.
180 Hom. *Il.* 19.95–131.
181 Apollod. 3.12.3.
182 Hes. *W.D.* 802–4.
183 Proclus on *Cypria*.
184 Hom. *Il.* 11.3–14.

4

The rise of Zeus and revolts against his rule

Our central concern in the present chapter will be the mythology of Zeus as the supreme ruler of the universe. As we have seen, he did not occupy that position from the beginning, but rose to power by displacing his father Cronos, who had won power for himself and his brothers and sisters, the Titans, by displacing his own father, Ouranos or Sky (see pp. 22ff.). We will thus start by considering the second part of the succession myth, which tells how Zeus was saved from suffering the same fate as his brothers and sisters, who had been swallowed by their father Cronos, and how he later forced Cronos to disgorge them and then joined together with them to drive the Titans from power. After Zeus had seized power in this way, the Olympian family still remained to be completed. The first generation of Olympian deities was made up of the children of Cronos and Rhea, while the younger Olympian deities were subsequently fathered by Zeus himself, who also fathered various lesser divine beings who were connected in one way or another with the new order. We will thus go on to consider how his marriage to Hera and his liaisons with other women, divine or mortal, contributed to the completing of the Olympian circle.

After having established his own power by rising up against the former ruling powers, Zeus had to quell two insurrections on his own account. The second part of the chapter will thus be devoted to these and other challenges that were raised against the authority of Zeus. There were two serious revolts that directly threatened the Olympian order, the first that of the monstrous **Typhon**, which can be regarded as forming the final part of the succession myth, and then the later revolt of the earth-born **Giants**, which took place during the heroic era; and there was also a third episode in which two gigantic brothers, the **Aloadai**, threatened to scale the heavens and attack Olympos but were killed before they could put their plan into effect (or at least fully achieve it). And finally, **Prometheus** presented a rather different challenge to Zeus, by resorting to cunning to advance the interests of the human race.

How Zeus established himself as the supreme god

Zeus revolts against Cronos and the Titans to establish the Olympian ruling order

In the previous stage of the succession myth, as recounted by Hesiod, Cronos mutilated his father, Ouranos or Sky, to enable him and the other Titans to emerge into the light of day, and then established himself as the supreme ruler of the universe with the other Titans as his subordinates (see p. 22). We now come to the next stage in which Zeus deposes Cronos in turn to establish the Olympian ruling order. Cronos had married his sister Rhea, and she conceived six splendid children to him, Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus, who would be the Olympian deities of the first generation, the other Olympians (apart perhaps from Aphrodite) being of later birth. Having been warned, however, by Earth and Sky that he would be overpowered by his own son, Cronos swallowed all of his children at birth to try to forestall that danger.¹

Rhea was greatly distressed by these actions of her husband and consulted Earth and Sky in turn when she was due to give birth to Zeus, to ask them to devise a plan that might enable her to give birth to him in secret, and so ensure that retribution might be visited on Cronos. On their advice, she secretly entrusted the new-born Zeus to Earth on Crete, and gave Cronos a stone instead, wrapped up in swaddling clothes, which he swallowed down in the belief that it was his child. Hesiod is very summary in his treatment of the subsequent events, merely indicating that Zeus grew up very rapidly in his Cretan hiding place, as might be expected of a divine child of his kind, and then forced Cronos to vomit up his children in accordance with advice that Rhea had received from Earth. First of all, Cronos vomited up the stone that he had swallowed last, and then the five brothers and sisters of Zeus, evidently in the opposite order to that in which he had swallowed them.² Zeus installed the stone at Delphi to be a sign and wonder to mortals, and it could still be seen there in historical times; Pausanias reports that it was of no great size, and that the Delphians used to anoint it with oil every day and place unspun wool on it on festival days.³

As his next step, Zeus released the Cyclopes (see p. 24), who had apparently remained imprisoned beneath the earth ever since they had been confined there by their father Sky (see p. 22); and they repaid him handsomely, mighty craftsmen that they were, by providing him with the thunderbolt that would prove crucial in enabling him to defeat the Titans, and also to maintain his dominance thereafter as supreme ruler.⁴ The main part of the succession myth concludes with an account of the Titanomachy, the greatest war ever fought, in which Zeus joined together with his brothers and sisters to wrest control of the universe from Cronos and the Titans. The Titans chose Mt Othrys in southern Thessaly as their stronghold, while Zeus and his allies fought from Mt Olympos on the northern borders of that land. The battle raged on for ten long years without either side gaining a clear advantage, until Gaia revealed to Zeus and the Olympians that they would be victorious if they recruited the Hundred-Handers as their allies. So Zeus released the monsters from their confinement (for they had remained imprisoned beneath the earth like the Cyclopes) and revived their strength and spirits with nectar and ambrosia. They were then only too pleased to accede to Zeus's request for help. The struggle now reached its

decisive phase as Zeus unleashed his full fury against the Titans, dazing them with his thunderbolts, while the Hundred-Handers pelted them with huge rocks in successive salvos. The entire universe resounded to the battle, from the high heavens to murky Tartaros, and even Chaos far below was pained by the heat of it. Cronos and the Titans finally succumbed to this overwhelming force and were hurled down to Tartaros by the Hundred-Handers, to remain imprisoned there forever. To ensure that they would be securely detained, Zeus appointed the Hundred-Handers to become their warders. After their hard-won victory, Zeus and his brothers and sisters, who were as yet the only Olympian deities, now assumed power as the new rulers of the universe in the third generation.⁵

As the three male gods of this first generation of Olympians, Zeus and his two brothers divided the world between themselves in such a way that each came to rule a particular part of it as his personal domain. According to a familiar tale, which is recounted by Homer (but never mentioned by Hesiod), they settled the matter swiftly and amicably by casting lots for the sea, the sky, and the Underworld, while agreeing to hold the earth and high Olympos in common. As a result of this process, Zeus won the broad sky, and Poseidon the grey sea as his home forever, and Hades the murky nether regions.⁶ It should be remarked, however, that Zeus was very much a first among equals in the parts of the universe that he supposedly shared with his brothers, and that Hades lived a life apart after descending to his infernal realm, having little contact with the Olympian gods in the world above. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* refers similarly to an initial tripartite division of the universe, without offering any details, while Pindar talks of a more general apportionment in which the other gods were also involved (but possibly as an idea that he had merely improvised for his immediate purposes).⁷

Such is the standard account of the succession myth as provided by Hesiod; Apollodorus offers an account of uncertain origin (perhaps derived from the lost *Titanomachia*, or from the Orphic literature), which differs from the Hesiodic version in some important respects. In this account Earth (Ge) brings the Hundred-Handers and Cyclopes to birth before the Titans, and their father Sky ties them up and hurls them down to Tartaros, presumably because of their monstrous nature; but when the Titans then come to be born, he apparently leaves them unharmed. Angered by the loss of her children who had been consigned to Tartaros, Earth then incites the Titans to attack their father. She provides Cronos with a sickle, as in Hesiod's version, but all of the Titans are now said to take part in the attack, with the sole exception of Oceanos (see p. 28 for the significance of this detail). Cronos makes the decisive move, however, by severing his father's genitals. After driving their father from power, the Titans recover their monstrous brothers from Tartaros and entrust the sovereignty to Cronos. But Cronos consigns the two sets of monsters to Tartaros once again, and proceeds to swallow his children at birth as in the usual story. Rhea saves Zeus in the usual way, and when he comes of age, he seeks the help of Metis (Cunning Wisdom personified), who tricks Cronos into swallowing an emetic drug to force him to disgorge his children. With the help of his brothers and sisters, Zeus then makes war against Cronos and the Titans for ten years, but he is unable to defeat them until Earth prophesies that victory will go to him if he enlists the aid of

the monsters who were banished to Tartaros by Cronos. So he kills their female warder, a certain Campe who is otherwise unknown, and sets them free. The Cyclopes arm him with his thunderbolt as usual, and also provide Poseidon with a trident and Hades with a cap of invisibility. With the aid of these devices and evidently with the help of the Hundred-Handers too, Zeus and his allies duly defeat the Titans and imprison them in Tartaros with the Hundred-Handers as their guards.⁸

Fitting though it may be that Cronos and the Titans, as a race of ‘former gods’, should be banished from the upper world forever, that was not invariably said to have been the case in post-Hesiodic accounts. Pindar states explicitly in one of his odes, for instance, that the Titans were eventually released by Zeus; and in *Prometheus Unbound*, a lost play ascribed to Aeschylus, they appeared on stage along with Prometheus after he was released from Tartaros, which would imply that they had been set free by Zeus.⁹ As has already been remarked, some of the figures who are named as Titans in Hesiod’s list could not have been removed from the upper world in any case at this early stage. Oceanos could not have deserted his streams (see p. 28), nor Tethys perhaps the sea; Themis and Mnemosyne are said to have engaged in liaisons with Zeus even in the latter part of the present text of the *Theogony*, and they were permanent forces in the world as the personifications of memory and right order; and Cronos and Rhea were themselves thought to be active in the world in so far as they were honoured in cult.

The childhood of Zeus in standard myth and local tradition

We must now return to the childhood of Zeus to fill in some details and note some variations. Rhea hid him away in Crete according to the standard tradition, although it was often claimed otherwise in the local legends of other Greek lands. Hesiod states that she went to Lyctos, a Cretan town that lay to the west of Cnossos, when she was due to give birth to Zeus, and handed him over to Earth to nourish and rear. So Earth hid him away deep within herself in a remote cave on Mt Aigaion (otherwise unknown, but presumably to be identified with one of the various mountains near Lyctos that contain Minoan holy caves).¹⁰ In the subsequent tradition, however, the cave is located elsewhere, either at Mt Ida in the centre of the island or, less commonly, on Mt Dicte to the east.¹¹

Zeus was reared during his infancy by a local nymph or nymphs. In what was perhaps the most favoured tradition, he was tended by a Cretan nymph called Amaltheia, who fed him on milk from a she-goat that she owned;¹² or in another version, which first appears in Callimachus, Amaltheia was the name of the goat itself, and Zeus was fed on its milk and on sweet honeycomb by a nymph called Adrasteia.¹³ Or else his nurses were Adrasteia and Ida, the daughters of Melisseus (‘Honey-man’, described as a primordial king of Crete), or by the Idaian nymphs Helice and Cynosura, or by others of their kind.¹⁴ There were also various picturesque tales in which he was said to have been fed by bees, or suckled by a sow or the like.¹⁵ To prevent Cronos from being able to hear the infant’s cries, some minor Cretan divinities, the Couretes (see p. 202), danced a noisy war dance near the

entrance to the cave, clashing their spears against their shields.¹⁶ Or, in a slightly different account, Amaltheia hung the infant in a cradle from a tree so that he could be found neither in heaven nor on earth nor in the sea, and the *Couretes* danced around the tree.¹⁷ Much of this is connected with ritual, and with Cretan ritual at that. Excavations have shown that a fair number of cave-sanctuaries in Crete were very ancient holy places dating back to the Minoan period; and it would seem that, in the caves that came to be identified as the birthplace of Zeus, he had replaced a Minoan deity, a divine youth who died each year (hence the paradoxical notion that Zeus had a grave in Crete). The dances of the *Couretes* can be related for their part to similar dances performed by Cretan youths in initiation rituals and the like (see p. 202).

There were also numerous local traditions in which Zeus was said to have been reared in mainland Greece (especially the Peloponnese) or Asia Minor. According to Arcadian tradition, for instance, Rhea brought him to birth on Mt Lycaion (an important centre for his cult, see p. 544), and three local nymphs, Neda, Theisoa, and Hagno, reared him on an area of the mountain that was known as Cretea. The two latter nymphs were eponyms of springs on the mountain, while Neda was the nymph of the river of that name that rose on the mountain, which was said to have been brought forth by Earth at Rhea's request to enable her to wash the new-born Zeus.¹⁸ The Messenians claimed, for their part, that the *Couretes* had conveyed the infant Zeus to their land, where he had been reared by Neda and Ithome, the latter being the eponym of the Messenian mountain of that name.¹⁹ In reporting this last tale, Pausanias remarks that it would be impossible, even if one should wish it, to number all the peoples who insisted that Zeus had been born and reared in their land; and the primacy of the Cretan tradition can be recognized in some of the details that have been cited in connection with these local legends.

Although it would take us far off course if we were to enquire too far into the many traditions and tales that came to be associated with the childhood of Zeus, there are some transformation myths that are perhaps worth recounting because of their picturesque nature, of relatively late origin though they may be. According to one such tale, the Cretan cave (of unspecified location) in which Zeus had been reared was inhabited by sacred bees that had tended him as an infant, but the cave was otherwise forbidden ground for gods and mortals alike. One day, however, some men ventured inside to steal some honey, wearing bronze armour (to protect themselves against the bees, and perhaps also for apotropaic purposes); but the armour split apart, and Zeus thundered and would have struck them with a thunderbolt if he had not been restrained by the *Moirai* (Fates) and *Themis*, who reminded him, as the guardians of divine law, that no one could be allowed to die in a place of such sanctity. So he transformed them instead into various birds that bore the same names as themselves. The narrator reports that some blood that had been left behind from the birth of Zeus used to boil up every year, evidently on the anniversary of his birth, causing a mass of flame to issue from the cave.²⁰

Some curious tales are recorded in astral mythology about the childhood of Zeus, and one such story claims that the she-goat that had nourished him as an infant was a wondrous child of the sun-god *Helios*. The Titans had been so terrified by its

appearance that they had asked Earth to hide it away in one of her caves in Crete, and she duly did so, placing it under the care of Amaltheia, who later fed Zeus on its milk. When Zeus was subsequently preparing to make war against the Titans, an oracle advised him to use the goat's hide as a weapon (i.e. as his aegis, see p. 76), because it was impenetrable and terrifying and had a Gorgon's head set on its back; and, after achieving victory as a consequence, he draped another hide over the bones of the dead goat, brought it back to life again and rendered it immortal, placing it in the heavens as Capella (the Goat), a bright star in the constellation of the Charioteer (Auriga).²¹ Or, in another tale of the kind, Cronos arrived in Crete while searching for Zeus, but was deceived by his son, who concealed his presence by transforming himself into a snake and his two nurses into bears. Zeus later commemorated the incident by placing images of the three animals in the sky as the constellations of the Dragon and the Greater and Lesser Bear (Draco and Ursa Major and Ursa Minor).²² Some said that he was removed to the island of Naxos when his father came in search of him, and was raised there from that time onwards.²³

The marriage of Zeus and the completing of the Olympian circle

The children of Zeus and Hera

Zeus found a consort within his own family by marrying his sister HERA. As the great goddess of Argos since time immemorial, Hera was perhaps the most exalted of all the Greek goddesses, and it is thus understandable that she should have come to be linked to the supreme god as his queen, even though she would originally have had no connection with him, and indeed remained largely independent of him in matters of cult. She was primarily the goddess of marriage and of married women; her nature and functions will be considered in [Chapter 6](#), as will various tales that were recounted in different places about her wedding to Zeus or first intercourse with him (see pp. 120ff.).

As yet only the first generation of Olympian deities had been brought into being, consisting of the six children of Cronos and Rhea; and Aphrodite too had been born by this time if she entered the world in the remarkable circumstances described in the *Theogony* (see p. 180). The marriage of Zeus and Hera would make only a limited contribution to the completing of the Olympian circle, resulting in the birth of only two of the foremost Olympian deities, while the rest would be fathered by Zeus through liaisons with other goddesses or with mortal women. Hera bore three or four children to Zeus as the offspring of their marriage, **Ares**, **Hebe**, and **Eileithuia** being universally regarded as children of Zeus and Hera, while **Hephaistos** was often thought to have been a child of Hera alone. The latter idea is first suggested in the *Theogony*, which reports that Hera was so angry when Zeus brought Athena to birth from his head that she brought Hephaistos to birth without prior intercourse with him.²⁴ It is indicated in the Homeric epics, however, and quite unequivocally in one passage at least, that Hera bore Hephaistos to Zeus in the same way as her other

children,²⁵ and both accounts of his origin can found in the subsequent tradition.

Irrespective of the latter point, one is struck by two things when considering the family of Zeus and Hera, firstly that their children could hardly be regarded as being among the very highest deities of the Olympian order, and secondly that, in view of their diverse origin, Ares being Thracian, Hebe Greek, Eileithuia Cretan, and Hephaistos probably Anatolian, they were not brought together into this same family on the basis of any very ancient tradition. Although Hephaistos must be acknowledged to have been a god of some importance, his cult was relatively restricted in its spread, and he was a somewhat ambiguous figure in myth as a lame god who worked with his hands; we will return to him in [Chapter 8](#) (see pp. 177ff.), concentrating for the present on the three lesser children who were universally regarded as having been born to both parents.

Although classed as one of the main Olympian gods, ARES, the god of war, was a deity of lesser standing than one might expect because he was primarily associated with the more brutal aspects of warfare, battle frenzy, slaughter, and strife as enjoyed for their own sakes. His name seems to have originated as an ancient word for war or battle, and he can virtually be regarded as bellicosity personified. Disciplined courage and chivalry were not his concern. He is portrayed in a most unflattering light from the time of Homer onwards, as a god who is disdained by other members of the Olympian circle; when he complains to his father in the *Iliad* after Diomedes has wounded him in battle, Zeus tells him not to sit and whine at his feet, saying that he finds him the most hateful of all the gods who inhabit Olympos, for he delights in nothing other than strife, war, and slaughter.²⁶ Ares never developed into a god of social, moral, or theological importance, in this respect contrasting sharply not only with Apollo but with the Italian Mars, with whom he was identified in Graeco-Roman cult and legend; for Mars had agricultural as well as warlike functions and was capable of embodying the idea of righteous vengeance. This wild god lived in a suitably wild territory, the northern land of Thrace, which was noted for its savage, warlike peoples; in the *Iliad*, he sets out from Thrace when he comes to join battle, and he hurries off to Thrace in the *Odyssey* after being caught in adultery by Hephaistos.²⁷ It is far from certain, however, that he was actually a god of Thracian origin as has often been supposed.

Doubtless because he is pictured as a butcher and berserker rather than a brave and self-controlled warrior, Ares is quite often portrayed as getting the worst of it in his martial encounters. Diomedes wounds him in the *Iliad*, as has been mentioned, with a little help from Athena, causing him to scream as loudly as nine or ten thousand men in battle and then flee up to heaven.²⁸ Athena herself treats him with some contempt in the battle of the gods later in the poem, felling him with a huge stone in a single blow, and mocking him for having presumed to match his strength against hers.²⁹ He engages more directly with mortals in battle than is usual for gods, and is even presented as stripping the armour from a fallen Greek warrior on one occasion.³⁰ According to the Hesiodic *Shield*, Heracles defeated him twice over, first bringing him to the ground with a thigh wound during the fighting at Pylos (see p. 264), and later doing so again in single combat when he was attacked by Ares after killing Cynos, son of Ares (see p. 267).³¹ A humiliation of a rather different

kind was imposed on him by the Aloudai, who imprisoned him in a bronze jar for thirteen months, and might even have caused his destruction if Hermes had not come to his rescue (see pp. 85–6); this too is an ancient legend, for it is mentioned in the *Iliad*.³²

Ares has a number of equally unappealing associates who accompany him into battle in the *Iliad*, including the female war-deity **Enyo** (Sacker of Cities), described elsewhere as being his daughter or indeed mother,³³ and his comrade and sister **Eris**, Strife personified (who appears in the *Theogony* as a daughter of Night and the mother of further members of the family of Night), as well as **Deimos** and **Phobos** (Panic and Fear), **Cydoimos**, who personifies the din and confusion of battle,³⁴ and **Ker** (or Death-spirit), whose cloak is red with human blood.³⁵ Deimos and Phobos are mentioned in the *Theogony* as two children who were borne to Ares by Aphrodite, along with a daughter of more conciliatory nature, Harmonia, who became the wife of Cadmos, king of Thebes³⁶ (see pp. 333ff. for her subsequent history). Ares was associated with Aphrodite from early times as a lover and cult-partner, or occasionally husband as in the *Theogony*. For Homer's story of how Hephaistos (here described as Aphrodite's husband) exposed the two of them to ridicule by trapping them together during an assignation, see p. 185. Simonides and some later authors suggest that Eros was another child of theirs, but there were many conflicting accounts of his origin.³⁷ Ares was otherwise thought to be a suitable father for heroes of a savage or bellicose nature, such as Diomedes of Thrace and Cycnos, two notable adversaries of Heracles (see pp. 249 and 267), Tereus of Thrace who raped and mutilated his sister-in-law (see p. 322), and others of that kind who will be mentioned later. In a looser sense, any warlike hero could be described as a scion of Ares.

Although Ares appears quite frequently in the *Iliad*, he is rarely introduced into mythical narratives in the subsequent literature even where war and carnage are involved. The one major story in which he does play an important part is the Theban foundation-myth, in which the founder, Cadmos, was said to have killed his sacred dragon in a spring near the site of the future city, and so had to appease him before he could found the city (see pp. 332ff). After they are reconciled, the god offers his daughter Harmonia to Cadmos as a wife (although in some accounts his anger was not yet fully allayed, see p. 366). He was also closely associated with the Amazons, as their main god and as the father of notable Amazons (or even of the entire race), and the Athenian high court of the Areiopagos was supposed to have been named after him after he was brought before it to be tried for murder, in the first trial ever to be held there (see p. 320).

Hebe and Eileithuia were deities of even lower standing, if of a more attractive nature. As the goddesses who personified the bloom of youth and presided over childbirth respectively, they were very appropriate children for Hera as a goddess who was intimately concerned with the life of women. In the *Iliad* HEBE performs various minor services for the other Olympian gods, pouring nectar for them, helping her mother to harness her chariot, and bathing Ares after he has been wounded.³⁸ After it came to be believed that Heracles was finally raised up to Olympos to become a god, the idea arose that Hebe was granted to him as a wife, in token of the

fact that he had now gained eternal youth (see p. 270); although this thought is suggested in a part of the *Theogony* that was of post-Hesiodic origin, and also in an interpolated passage in the *Odyssey*,³⁹ it could hardly have originated any earlier than the sixth century BC. If this provided Hebe with her first and only really notable role in myth, there is also a tale from Euripides in which she is said to have rejuvenated a nephew of Heracles, Iolaos, to enable him to kill an enemy of the family, see p. 278.

EILEITHUIA was a very ancient goddess of childbirth who was honoured throughout the Greek world. The *Odyssey* refers to her sacred cave at Amnisos on Crete, and, since a Linear B tablet from Cnossos refers to honey-offerings that were made to her there, her cult can definitely be traced back to the Mycenaean period. Although she is mentioned quite often in mythical contexts in connection with her function in easing childbirth, it is an understandable if somewhat paradoxical fact that she makes her only significant appearances in myths in which she is prevented from performing her function, on occasions when Hera sets out to hinder the births of illegitimate children of Zeus. Hera thus ensures that Eileithuia is held back on Olympus, for a time at least, when Leto is due to give birth to Apollo and Artemis (see further on p. 135), and also restrains her from helping in the birth of Heracles (see p. 237).

We also find references in the *Iliad* and elsewhere to Eileithuiai in the plural, as a collective body of goddesses of childbirth;⁴⁰ and although Homer talks more often of Eileithuia as an individual figure, it is the Eileithuiai who are described as being held back by Hera in his account of the last-mentioned myth. Since the goddess and goddesses alike are wholly transparent in their function, without any individual character, it makes little difference in myth or cult whether there be one or more. Eileithuia also appears as a title of Hera in so far as she concerned herself with childbirth, and of Artemis too, another great goddess who took an interest in such matters. The Romans equated Eileithuia with Lucina or Juno Lucina, their own goddess of childbirth.

At Olympia in the province of Elis, Eileithuia was honoured in conjunction with a divine child called Sosipolis. The origin of this cult was explained by the following legend. On a certain occasion long ago, as the Eleians were expecting a counter-attack from an invading army of Arcadians, a local woman approached the Eleian commanders with a baby and told them that he was her own son and that a dream had ordered her to hand him over to fight for Elis. Taking her at her word, the authorities laid him naked in front of the army; and when the Arcadians advanced, he changed into a snake, causing them such alarm that they turned and fled. After their victory, the Eleians raised a temple to the child at the spot where they thought that the snake had disappeared into the ground. They called the new god-child Sosipolis (Saviour of the State) and decided to worship Eileithuia in conjunction with him because 'she herself had brought him into the world'.⁴¹

Zeus completes the Olympian circle by fathering further divine children outside his marriage

If Ares and Hephaistos were born as a result of his marriage to Hera, Zeus also fathered other Olympian deities outside his marriage, along with lesser divine beings who were associated in some way with the Olympian order. He fathered **Apollo** and **Artemis** by the goddess Leto, who was herself of purely Titan descent as we have already seen (p. 37), and although he brought **Athena** to birth from his own head, she was also in some sense a daughter of the goddess Metis, as we will see shortly. If **Aphrodite** had not been born at a very early period in the manner described in the *Theogony* (see p. 180), Zeus fathered her by another goddess, Dione, see below; but **Hermes** and **Dionysos** were both borne to him by mortal women, Maia, daughter of Atlas, and Semele, daughter of Cadmos, respectively, and must thus have been born at a later time, during the heroic era. Towards the end of the *Theogony*, in a part of the poem that was almost certainly added after Hesiod's time, six of the main divine mistresses of Zeus are presented as having been former wives of his, before his final marriage to Hera. Although this scheme seems to have left little mark on the subsequent tradition, it will be convenient to consider these various liaisons in the order in which they are listed in the poem,⁴² since we have been taking it as our main guide.

The first union, with the Oceanid nymph Metis, is of particular interest because it accounted for the origin of Zeus's favourite daughter, Athena. One of the many daughters of Oceanos and Tethys (see pp. 38ff), Metis was the personification of cunning wisdom, and thus represented a quality that could be fittingly associated with Zeus; but he incurred some danger by approaching her, because she was fated to bear two exceptional children, first a daughter who would be almost as wise and strong as her father, and, more ominously, a son of overbearing spirit who would displace him as the ruler of gods and mortals. On being warned of this danger by Earth and Sky, Zeus followed their advice by swallowing her while she was pregnant with the first child, so that Athena came to be born from his own body, emerging from his head, and the dangerous son could never come to be conceived.⁴³ Or, in a somewhat different version from another poem in the Hesiodic corpus (possibly the *Melampodeia*), Zeus was so angry when Hera brought Hephaistos to birth as a fatherless child (see p. 70) that he set out to perform a comparable feat, and succeeded in some sense at least by having intercourse with Metis and then swallowing her so as to bring the resulting child to birth from within himself. He was afraid in this version too that she might bear him a son who would be more powerful than himself, but had not received any prophetic warning about the matter.⁴⁴ Athena's entry into the world, although it may have taken a strange form, was pictured as having been an awe-inspiring event, and Hephaistos was sometimes said to have eased the process by cleaving Zeus's head with an axe, see further on p. 155.

The various elements in the myth of Athena's birth can be disentangled without any great difficulty. The savage motif of the swallowing was evidently recycled from the succession myth; to avoid the danger of being displaced by a son of his own, Zeus adopted this strategy just as his father Cronos had done before him, but now by swallowing the prospective mother of the child rather than the child itself at birth. By swallowing Metis, he could be imagined furthermore to have taken possession of the cunning wisdom that she represented. In all probability, the story of Athena's

birth from his head originated in very early times as a separate myth, independently of any connection with Metis; but Metis was a suitable mother for Athena in so far as both goddesses were connected with practical wisdom, and Zeus's swallowing of her could explain besides how he came to be 'pregnant' with Athena in the first place.

After swallowing his first wife (as Metis is presented as having been in the Hesiodic scheme), Zeus turned to the Titan **Themis**, who could be thought to represent another aspect of his rule as the personification of law and right order. She bore him two sets of children who contributed in their different ways to the ordering of the world, the Horai (Seasons, see further on p. 194), and also the Moirai or Fates, who were originally classed by Hesiod as daughters of Night, along with other sinister powers connected with doom and death (see p. 59), but are now reclassified in so far as they rightfully apportion good and ill to human beings in accordance with the will of Zeus.⁴⁵ Themis is usually presented elsewhere as having been a counsellor of Zeus rather than a consort, who advises him not to court Thetis (see p. 429) and helps him to plot the outbreak of the Trojan War (see p. 454). One of the Homeric hymns portrays her as sitting beside him as his confidante, leaning towards him to listen to his words of wisdom.⁴⁶ According to a fragment from Pindar, on the other hand, she was the first wife of Zeus, who was brought up to Olympos by the Moirai to become his bride and bear the Horai (Seasons) to him.⁴⁷ She was gifted with prophetic powers like her mother Earth, whom she was sometimes said to have succeeded as the presiding deity at Delphi before the arrival of Apollo.⁴⁸ In the Homeric epics, in which she is mentioned only three times and never as a consort or confidante of Zeus, she seems to be credited with a special role as a goddess who convenes and presides over feasts and assemblies.⁴⁹

Next comes **Eurynome**, who was an Oceanid nymphlike Metis and bore a single set of daughters to Zeus, the Charites or Graces, who bring charm and grace to every aspect of life, see further on p. 193.⁵⁰ Rather more important was Zeus's next union with his sister the corn-goddess **Demeter**, which led to the birth of Kore (the Maiden), otherwise known as Persephone (see pp. 94ff.).⁵¹ **Mnemosyne**, the personification of Memory, a second Titan mistress of Zeus, bore the Muses to him (see p. 190),⁵² and the sixth and last of his preliminary wives (if they can be regarded as such) was his cousin **Leto**, a daughter of the Titans Coios and Phoibe, who bore two great Olympian deities to him as her twin children, Apollo and Artemis,⁵³ bringing them to birth on the island of Delos after meeting with grave difficulties on the way, see p. 135. Since Leto was generally presented in this regard as having been a victim of Hera's jealousy, it could be more fittingly assumed that Zeus became involved with her after his marriage to Hera, rather than before as in the scheme in the *Theogony*.

There is one consort of Zeus, and assuredly a very ancient one, who is not included in the list of his supposed prior marriages in the *Theogony*, namely **DIONE**, who is presented in the *Iliad* as having borne Aphrodite to Zeus. Her absence is hardly surprising, since Hesiod offers a wholly different account of the origin of Aphrodite, connecting it with the mutilation of Sky (see p. 27). Although Dione is mentioned twice in earlier parts of the *Theogony*, first among the deities who are praised in the processional songs of the Muses, and then among the daughters of

Oceanos,⁵⁴ it is nowhere suggested that she has any special connection with Zeus. She makes only single appearance in the Homeric epics, comforting and consoling Aphrodite when she arrives on Olympus after having been wounded in battle by Diomedes (p. 368).⁵⁵ There are other indications too that suggest that she was once of greater importance than might be inferred from the scant mention of her in the works of the main poets. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* includes her, for instance, among the foremost goddesses who attended upon Leto when she gave birth to Apollo;⁵⁶ and it is itself significant that her name seems to be no more than a feminine equivalent of that of Zeus (which takes the form of Dios in the genitive). In classical times, she was a major goddess at one place alone, at Dodona in Epirus, the site of an ancient oracle of Zeus, where she was honoured as the consort of Zeus Naios (of the running water).⁵⁷ Pherecydes describes Dione as a nymph of Dodona for understandable reasons, while Apollodorus, perhaps on the basis of an early tradition, makes her a far grander figure by classing her among the Titans⁵⁸ (although he describes her as a Nereid elsewhere, evidently in accordance with another source). Hesiod's account of the origin of Aphrodite largely supplanted the one that made her a daughter of Dione, and the latter relationship is never reflected in cult, although poets in the later tradition sometimes refer to Aphrodite as Dionaia (i.e. daughter of Dione) or even call her Dione.

From the classical period onwards, it was commonly believed that there were twelve principal gods, an idea that was derived from cultic rather than strictly mythological considerations. The cult of the Twelve Gods originated in Asia Minor during the archaic period and was firmly established on the Greek mainland by the fifth century BC; Pindar refers to the cult of the Twelve Gods at Olympia, where they were honoured at six altars, and Herodotus and Thucydides both mention an altar that was raised to them in the Athenian agora by the younger Peisistratos.⁵⁹ The canonic list of the Twelve, as established at Athens and later transferred to Rome, ran as follows: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Hermes, Athena, Hephaistos, and Hestia.⁶⁰ It will be noted that Hestia, who enjoyed a certain precedence in cult but was of no importance in myth (see p. 124), is included in the list while Dionysos is absent; but those who are named in it are otherwise the deities who would be regarded as the principal Olympians from a mythological point of view. A variety of other gods were listed among the Twelve in connection with the cult of the Twelve Gods in other localities. The following gods were honoured, for instance, at the six altars at Olympia: Zeus Olympios, Poseidon, Hera, Athena, Hermes, Apollo, the Charites (Graces), Dionysos, Athena, Alpheios (a river-god of the area, see p. 40), Cronos, and Rhea.⁶¹

As everyone knows, Zeus was a prodigiously amorous god who was associated with a great many mortal women too, quite apart from the two who bore Olympian gods to him, and was credited with a multitude of children. In a humorous passage in the *Iliad*, he recites a list of his conquests to his wife as he is about to make love with her, saying that he never felt such desire for any of them as he now feels for her, not even for the wife of Ixion, who bore Peirithoos to him, or Danae, who bore the great Perseus to him, or Europa, who bore Minos and Rhadamanthys to him, or Alcmene, who bore Heracles to him, or Semele, or – among goddesses – Demeter or

Leto (and he could have cited many more).⁶² Rather than attempting to list all his liaisons with mortal women here, we will deal with them as they arise in the context of the mythical history of the heroic era.

Revolts against Zeus and the Olympian order

Zeus as the all-powerful sky-god

As is implied in the above-mentioned story of the division of power between Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, Zeus was above all the god of the sky, and most especially of the phenomena of the lower atmosphere, of cloud, rain, and storm. As his titles and epithets suggest, he is the cloud-gatherer, the thunderer, the sender of lightning or of rain, or of favourable winds. Many Indo-European peoples had a deity who more or less corresponded with him, such as Dyaus in India, Iuppiter (i.e. Dyaus pita, the addition meaning ‘father’) in Italy, or Tiwaz among the Germanic people. He was so widely worshipped, however, and acquired so many responsibilities as the supreme god, that there was hardly a department of nature or of human activity with which he was not connected in some way. He was the protector of the household and social order, and all sovereignty and law proceeded from him; he was represented as having moral concerns from an early period, particularly as a guardian of suppliants and strangers, and an overseer of oaths and justice. In the course of time his name came to be used by thinkers of a monotheistic tendency as being practically equivalent to ‘God’. Even if his myths can be grotesque or frivolous, he is consistently represented in art as a stately and majestic figure, a vigorous man in the prime of life, standing or sitting in a dignified attitude, usually draped from the waist down, bearing a sceptre or thunderbolt, or both, and attended by his special bird, the eagle.

The thunderbolt was consistently regarded as one of the most important attributes of Zeus. Before it came to be understood that lightning is an electrical discharge, its destructive power encouraged the thought that some heavy, pointed missile must come down from the sky along with the lightning-flash; and what could be more natural than to assume that this was the special weapon of the sky-god? In artistic images Zeus’s thunderbolt was represented as a biconical object, often having conventionalized lightning-flashes attached to it, and sometimes wings too. As we have seen, it was supposed to have been fashioned for him by the Cyclopes.

The aegis (properly *aigis* in Greek) was another notable attribute of Zeus, although it came to be increasingly associated with his daughter Athena above all, and Aigiochos, or Aegis-bearer was accordingly a regular title of his. The aegis is described by various authors from Homer onwards as a fringed garment or piece of armour that could be worn as a corselet or serve as a sort of shield. According to the *Iliad*, Hephaistos had given it to Zeus as a fearsome object that would cause terror in men, and it was bright to behold and shaggy-fringed, with a hundred golden tassels.⁶³ Although Zeus shakes it at one point in the poem to induce panic in the Greeks, and it is suggested that he will shake it over Troy on the day that the city

falls,⁶⁴ it is used more often by his favourite daughter Athena (and also by Apollo on two occasions).⁶⁵ In the subsequent tradition it is primarily an attribute of Athena, who can often be seen wearing it in vase-paintings, in which it is frequently represented as being fringed with snake-heads. From the way in which it is described and the literal meaning of the word, which simply means goat-skin, it is clear that it was imagined as a goat-skin with the hairs left in place, forming a fringe. As a garment of rough hide it would serve as a defence, not only against the weather but also against a blow from an enemy; and a divine aegis, as worn or brandished by an immensely powerful deity, might be imagined as a potent defence and an awe-inspiring object.

Since Zeus was so much stronger than the other Olympian gods, threats would usually suffice to deter them from opposing his will, let alone from rebelling against his rule. If need be, he could threaten to strike them with his thunderbolt, or to hurl them down from Olympus by the direct use of force. He reminds Hera in the *Iliad* that he once hung her up in the air, evidently on a rope, with her wrists tied with a golden band and with two anvils suspended from her feet, as the other gods stood by powerless to help.⁶⁶ The most telling passage in this regard can be found at the beginning of Book 8 of the epic, when Zeus is warning his fellow Olympians not to disobey him by intervening on either side in the Trojan War. If any of them should venture to do so, he will strike or blast them (the word could carry either meaning), forcing them to return to Olympus in ignominy, or else he will hurl them down to Tartaros, which lies far below Hades; and he then boasts that if all the other gods and goddesses grasped one end of a golden cord and he the other, they would be unable to drag him down from Olympus, whereas he, if he set his mind to it, could haul them all up along with the earth and sea besides, and then fasten the cord to a peak of Olympus to leave everything dangling in mid-air.⁶⁷ Homer does refer, however, to one episode in which Hera, Athena, and Poseidon plotted to overpower Zeus and tie him up, but were foiled by the prompt action of Thetis, who summoned the hundred-handed Briareos (see p. 25) up from the sea to intimidate them.⁶⁸ There is no way of telling whether the poet drew this story from the prior tradition or simply invented it for his immediate purposes. It is at least possible that there was an ancient tale in which these three deities, who were keen supporters of the Greek cause in the Trojan War, wanted to attempt to force their will on Zeus at some stage in the conflict.

It was commonly agreed, however, that all the serious threats against Zeus came from outside the Olympian circle and were directed against the Olympian order as a whole. There were two revolts that led to direct conflict and placed that order under serious threat, launched by the monstrous Typhon and then the race of Giants. There was also a threatened revolt by two gigantic brothers, the Aloadae, which was frustrated before it could be put into effect (or full effect), because they were killed by Apollo before they could reach full growth.

The Revolt of Typhon

The myth of the revolt of Typhon seems to have been of earlier origin than that of

the Giants, since it is recounted by Hesiod as the last stage of the succession myth, while he apparently had no knowledge of any conflict between the gods and the Giants. The canonic account of the later episode seems to have been established somewhat later, in an early epic that had become widely known by the end of the sixth century BC. The story of the revolt of Typhon was probably introduced from the east, by contrast, as part of the succession myth, in view of the eastern connections of Typhon, who was particularly associated with Cilicia as we will see, and of the fact that similar tales of a revolt by a monster or group of monsters can be found in eastern succession myths. In the above-mentioned Hurro-Hittite succession myth (see pp. 29–30), the sky-god is thus confronted with a revolt from a monstrous being called Ullikummi.

The name of the monstrous opponent of Zeus appears in two different forms, as TYPHON (Typhaon in epic) or as TYPHOEUS. Although Hesiod uses both, we will consistently use the more familiar form in the present discussion. According to the *Theogony*, Earth bore Typhon to Tartaros, who represents the dark and sinister nethermost region of the universe (see pp. 18–19) and is credited by Hesiod with no other children.⁶⁹ Tartaros was presumably chosen for this role because a being fathered by him could be pictured as being the most terrible creature imaginable. Hesiod does not explain why Earth, who had shown favour to Zeus and had played a crucial role in helping him to rise to power, should have wished to bring forth a monster that would present such a danger to him, nor does he say that she did so with any hostile intent. In all likelihood, the poet was not interested in the point, and simply made her his mother since she was an obvious parent for such a gigantic monster. The resulting conflict is presented by him as a primordial conflict that took place as the next notable event after the Titanomachy, before Zeus was formally accepted by the other gods as the new ruler of the universe.

The war between the gods and the Giants, when that story was subsequently introduced, had to be placed at a much later period, not long before the Trojan War, because the assistance that Heracles provided to the gods as a mortal helper was a central feature of the myth from the beginning. In trying to bring some order into this body of myth, Apollodorus (or his source) overlooks this point, and places the revolt of the Giants before that of Typhon, explaining that Earth brought the Giants to birth in anger at the fate of the Titans, and grew even angrier when they met with defeat and so mated with Tartaros to bring forth Typhon, evidently as a being who would present an even greater danger to Zeus and the Olympian gods.⁷⁰ Plausible though it may seem, however, that Earth should have been distressed by the fall of the Titans in so far as they were children of hers, she was portrayed in the succession myth as a supporter of Zeus, and it is sometimes best to accept early myths just as they are given, without placing too much weight on the rationalizations of mythographers of a later era.

First of all, how are we to picture the monster? Hesiod describes him as follows:

Strength lay in his hands, and the feet of the mighty god were untiring; and from his shoulders sprang a hundred serpent's heads, terrible dragon's heads with dark flickering tongues, and the eyes beneath the brows of these wondrous heads flashed

fire, and fire blazed from every head as he glared around. In all his dreadful heads there were voices that sent forth every kind of unspeakable sound, for at one time they uttered words that would be comprehensible to the gods, and at other times sounds like those of a bellowing bull, proud in its untamed fury, and sometimes like those of a lion, relentless in its valour, and sometimes like those of yelping puppies, a wonder to hear, and sometimes he would hiss like a snake until the high mountains echoed.⁷¹

Eloquent though it may be in its clumsy fashion, this passage does not provide a full and clear description of Typhon, merely indicating that many serpent's heads with fiery eyes sprang from his shoulders. Although some later authors present Typhon as actually breathing fire, Hesiod seems to be talking in a purely figurative sense when he uses such language in relation to these heads. The next literary portrait of him, from a prose summary of a poem by Nicander (second century BC), states that he had numerous heads and arms and wings, and also that he had huge dragon's coils emerging from his thighs.⁷² The wings can be found at an earlier period in vase-paintings, which generally depict Typhon as a composite being with a human head and torso and a lower body formed from two or more serpent's tails. Since snakes are chthonic beings that emerge from crevices in earth, earth-born men or monsters are quite often imagined as being serpent-tailed (as in the case of Cecrops, see p. 318, or the Giants in later portrayals). In Apollodorus' description of Typhon, which is full and memorable, if muddled in places, there seems to be some confusion between these serpent's tails, as found in artistic images, and the serpent's heads that spring from Typhon's shoulders in the *Theogony*; for we are told that a hundred dragon's heads sprang from his arms, and that the serpent's coils from beneath his thighs reached up to his head when fully extended and emitted violent hisses. He was of such monstrous size, moreover, that he rose higher than any mountain, and could reach out to the east and the west with his outstretched arms; and he had wings all over his body, foul hair sprang from his head and cheeks, and fire flashed from his eyes.⁷³



Figure 4.1. Typhoeus. Bronze relief: shield band panel from Olympia. Drawing.

In Hesiod's account of the revolt of Typhon, the issue is settled by single combat between him and Zeus, and the other gods play no part whatever. Swiftly recognizing that the monster presented a grave threat, Zeus directed his full power against him, thundering mightily, causing the earth, sky, and sea to resound, and Olympos to reel beneath his feet. Such heat was created by Zeus's thunder and lightning, and by the fire from the monster, that the earth, sea, and sky began to boil, and there was such an uproar that Hades trembled in his subterranean realm, as did even the Titans far below in Tartaros. Although the flame that issued from Typhon seems to have been generated here by Zeus's thunderbolts, some later authors assumed that the monster made his own contribution by breathing fire from his mouth. After manifesting his might in this way, Zeus leapt down from Olympos and struck Typhon, and burned all the marvellous heads, forcing him down to the ground as a maimed and helpless wreck. Flame shot forth from the felled monster, causing much of the earth to become scorched and to melt like molten tin or iron, until Zeus completed his victory by hurling the defeated monster down to Tartaros.⁷⁴

Nothing was left of him in the world above apart from his progeny, namely the children who had been borne to him by Echidna (as previously mentioned, see p. 56), and all the fierce and harmful winds that are now mentioned for the first time as being of Typhoean origin.⁷⁵ These noxious winds, which bring harm to sailors and damage to crops, must be distinguished from the three main winds of a more beneficial nature that had been brought to birth by Eos (see p. 46).

In subsequent accounts of Typhon's revolt, many new factors are introduced into the story, mostly from the east. The other Olympian deities, (many of whom would not yet have been born if the episode took place immediately after the Titanomachy as in the *Theogony*) are now brought into the narrative, but only to make a hasty and ignominious retreat, so that the battle still remains above all a contest between Zeus and Typhon. For the gods were so terrified when Typhon launched his attack that they fled to Egypt and hid themselves away by turning themselves into animals of various kinds. This tale of flight and transformation may have been fairly ancient if it was recounted by Pindar, as is reported.⁷⁶ It was inspired by an Egyptian myth in which the god Seth and his followers were said to have transformed themselves into animals when pursued by Horus. Since the Greeks identified Typhon with Seth rather than the pursuer Horus and had no interest in the original significance of the transformations, the myth was naturally much altered when they adapted it for their own purposes, to provide a mythical explanation for the theriomorphic nature of the Egyptian gods. In the earliest surviving version, ascribed to Nicander,⁷⁷ Apollo transforms himself into a hawk, Hermes into an ibis, Artemis into a cat, Hephaistos into an ox, and so forth. The basic pattern is obvious enough: in so far as the various gods were identified with a specific Egyptian god according to accepted tradition, they were said to have transformed themselves into the animal form associated with that Egyptian god. If the animal in question had some connection with the respective Greek god in native myth or cult, so much the better, but that was not the essential point. So Apollo, for instance, who happens to be compared to a hawk in the *Iliad* and elsewhere,⁷⁸ is said to have turned himself into a falcon in the present narrative because he was identified with the Egyptian god Horus, who was represented as a falcon or with a falcon's head.⁷⁹ In his later version, however, Ovid departs from the original scheme by saying that Apollo turned himself into a crow, the bird that was most closely associated with him in Greek myth.⁸⁰ A further detail was added to the story in astral mythology, to provide a mythical explanation for the origin of Capricorn, a constellation representing a 'goat-fish', a Mesopotamian monster that had no counterpart in Greek myth. After fleeing to Egypt along with the other gods, Pan threw himself into the Nile to hide away from Typhon, turning his hindquarters into those of a fish, and his forequarters into those of a goat; and Zeus was so impressed by his ingenious strategy that he placed an image of the resulting goat-fish among the stars.⁸¹

We may turn to Apollodorus for a relatively full account of the succeeding events, which includes some features not mentioned elsewhere. After Typhon began to attack heaven, hurling flaming rocks at it and breathing streams of fire from his mouth, all the gods fled with the sole exception of Zeus, who thus had to confront him without their help, by first pelting him with thunderbolts from a distance and

then lashing out at him with an adamantine sickle (*harpē*). After pursuing the severely wounded monster to Mt Casion in Syria, he grappled with him face to face; but Typhon managed to envelop Zeus in his coils and wrested the sickle away from him to cut the tendons from his hands and feet. He then carried him through the sea to Cilicia in the south-eastern corner of Asia Minor, and deposited him in a cave known as the Corycian cave, hiding the severed tendons inside in a bear's skin; and he appointed a fellow-monster as guard, the she-dragon Delphyne, who was formed half like a snake and half like a beautiful maiden. Hermes and Aigipan (Goat-Pan) stole away the tendons, however, and fitted them back into Zeus, who soon recovered his vigour and returned to the fray. Descending from heaven in a chariot, Zeus hurled thunderbolts at Typhon and pursued him to Mt Nysa (of uncertain location, see p. 164), where the Moirai (Fates) deceived the monster into eating the 'ephemeral fruits' (otherwise unknown), which robbed him of some of his strength. When pursued north to Haimon, however, a mountain range in Thrace, he was still strong enough to hurl whole mountains at Zeus, who thrust them back against him by use of his thunderbolt, causing Typhon to shed so much blood (*haima*) that the range below was known as Haimon from that time forth. Typhon then fled overseas to Sicily, where Zeus completed his victory by burying him under Mt Etna.⁸²

Although this narrative takes Typhon into other areas besides, he was most closely associated with Asia Minor, especially the south-eastern province of Cilicia, which may well have been his original homeland. In a passing reference in the *Iliad*, Homer mentions that his bed (i.e. burial place) lay in the land of the Arimoi (*ein Arimois*, a phrase that was also interpreted as referring to some mountains called the Arima);⁸³ and Hesiod states correspondingly that Echidna, a monster who bore children to Typhon in his account (see p. 56), lived in a cave beneath the earth *ein Arimoisin*.⁸⁴ Most scholars of Hellenistic and later times believed that the Arimoi were a people who lived somewhere in Asia Minor;⁸⁵ but even if they were right, as is likely enough, their ideas were apparently based on conjecture rather than direct evidence from the early tradition. It seems to have been well established by Pindar's time in any case that Cilicia was Typhon's homeland, for the poet refers to him as 'Cilician Typhoeus', and remarks that he was reared in the 'renowned Cilician cave' that plays such an important part in Apollodorus' narrative.⁸⁶ Apollodorus' story of the stolen sinews was surely taken from Near Eastern mythology; it has been observed that there is a parallel in the Hittite tale of the struggle between the Storm-god and the dragon Illuyanka. In that myth, the Storm-god was initially defeated by Illuyanka, who robbed him of his heart and eyes; but he went on to father a son who married the dragon's daughter and recovered the stolen heart and eyes with his wife's aid. When the Storm-god was then restored to his original condition, he set out against the dragon for a second time and killed him.⁸⁷

Typhon's connection with Etna was fairly old even if it could not have been a very ancient feature of his legend. Pindar and *Prometheus Bound* already mention that he is buried under the volcano and causes its eruptions by breathing forth streams of fire.⁸⁸ Apollodorus seems to be exceptional in ascribing the eruptions to the after-effects of the thunderbolts that were hurled against him by Zeus. According to an alternative tradition first recorded by Pherecydes, Zeus buried Typhon under

the island of Pythecousai (i.e. Ischia, off Naples, which contains hot springs and a volcano that was still active in antiquity).⁸⁹ Other mythical explanations were also offered, however, for the flame and smoke of Mt Etna, for some claimed that the Giant Encelados was buried under it (see p. 83), or that the forge of Hephaistos was located in it (see p. 179).

It should perhaps be mentioned that the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* and the early lyric poet Stesichorus offer a different account of Typhon's origin, in which Hera is said to have brought him to birth as a fatherless child because she was so angry that Zeus had brought Athena to birth from his head. According to the Hymn, she struck the ground with her hand in her fury, and prayed to Earth, Sky, and the Titans below that she should bear a child of her very own without Zeus being involved, a child who would be as much stronger than him as he was stronger than Cronos. She gave birth in due time to the dreadful monster Typhaon, a being who was neither like the gods nor like mortal men, and entrusted him to the she-dragon of Delphi to be reared. The poem tells us almost nothing about the subsequent life of the monster, merely remarking, rather surprisingly, that it brought great harm to mortals.⁹⁰

The war between the gods and the Giants

The other major revolt against Zeus and the Olympian order was launched by the GIANTS (Gigantes), who were defeated by the gods with the aid of Heracles in the mighty conflict known as Gigantomachy (*Gigantomachia*). The Giants were earth-born, as their Greek name implies; according to the *Theogony*, they were conceived by Gaia in the very earliest times from drops of blood that fell to the ground from the severed genitals of Ouranos.⁹¹ Hesiod describes them as powerful warriors who wore gleaming armour and carried long spears in their hands, an account that conforms with the usual portrayal of them in archaic works of art. It is not clear whether the poet meant to suggest that they sprang up from the ground fully armed (like the Spartoi at Thebes, see p. 333); Claudian, a Roman poet of the fourth century AD, is the first author to state this explicitly.⁹² Even though the Giants are presented as martial beings, there is no indication in the *Theogony* that they ever revolted against the gods (except perhaps in a late section of the poem probably added after Hesiod's time, which seems to refer to the contribution that Heracles was supposed to have made in helping to defeat the Giants).⁹³ There is indeed no proper evidence at all for the revolt until the first artistic representations appear in the second half of the sixth century BC.

Early references to beings of this name can also be found in the *Odyssey*. The Phaeacians, a mythical island people of the remote west (see p. 434–5), are compared with the 'wild tribes of the Giants' and the Cyclopes in so far as they are likewise closely akin to the gods; and in another passage, the Laistrygonians (some adversaries of Odysseus in those remote seas), who seem to have been very large and were certainly very violent (see p. 507), are described as being 'not like men, but like Giants'; and thirdly, we are told that a certain Eurymedon was once king of the overbearing Giants, but brought destruction on himself and his people in unexplained circumstances.⁹⁴ These Giants are imagined, then, as being belligerent

beings who fall somewhere between gods and men, much as in the *Theogony*. There is no reason to suppose, however, that these Homeric Giants who lived in such remote parts are the same as the Hesiodic Giants (any more than in the case of the Cyclopes, see p. 24), or that their fall had anything to do with a revolt against the gods. The early evidence is too thin, alas, for it to be possible to trace the early development of their mythology before the time of the first evidence for their war against the gods.

The main features of the story of their revolt were first established, in all probability, in an early epic account that was widely familiar by the early sixth century BC and came to be accepted as canonic. The richness and consistency of the artistic record from that century and the next would otherwise be hard to explain, and the popularity of the story in that period is also indicated in a disapproving remark by Xenophanes (born c. 570 BC), who mentions the Gigantomachy along with the Titanomachy as an unedifying subject best avoided in after-dinner recitations.⁹⁵ The earliest literary references reveal nothing about the conflict apart from its location and its most surprising feature, namely that the gods had to call on the assistance of Heracles (at a time when he was no more than a mortal hero). Pindar mentions that he brought the Giants to the ground with his arrows, including their king, Porphyryon, as they were confronting the gods on the plain of Phlegrai; and the Hesiodic *Catalogue* reports likewise that he brought destruction to the Giants at Phlegrai as he was returning from his campaign against Troy.⁹⁶ On maps of the Aegean, the most striking feature of its northern shoreline is the Chalcidice with its three 'prongs', the peninsulas of Pallene, Sithonia, and Athos. Phlegra or Phlegrai, the traditional home of the Giants, was usually identified with the westernmost peninsula, Pallene (although the adjoining peninsula of Sithonia and some of the hinterland of the Chalcidice were sometimes also thought to be part of it). Although the Giants seem to have confronted the gods on their home ground of Phlegrai in the original story, accounts were developed in which they took the battle to the enemy by trying to storm Olympos; and specific duels were said to have ranged further abroad, as we will see, to the southern Aegean and as far away as Sicily. Some Hellenistic and later accounts even transfer the entire conflict to other regions, such as Arcadia or the Phlegraean (Fiery) plain in the neighbourhood of Mt Vesuvius in Italy.⁹⁷

Apollodorus is the first author to provide a full surviving account of the progress of the conflict. If the individual motifs from his narrative are checked against the earliest artistic and literary record, it soon becomes evident that this is a composite version that was constructed mainly from early material but also contains a few stories (or variants) from the later tradition. An element that is certainly old is the involvement of Heracles who was on the island of Cos at this time, having been driven there by storm-winds while sailing back from his campaign against Troy (see p. 262). The gods knew from an oracle that none of the Giants could be killed if they attacked them on their own, but that they needed to enlist the help of a mortal ally if they were to destroy them. When Gaia heard of this oracle, she searched for a herb that would prevent her sons from being destroyed by such an ally, but Zeus forestalled her by ordering Dawn and the Sun and Moon not to shine until he himself

had plucked the herb, and he then told Athena to summon Heracles as the ally who was required. So the fate of the Giants was now sealed.⁹⁸ This motif of the essential helper in which gods (or kings) have to depend on an inferior to achieve their victories can be found in the myths and folklore of many lands; we have already seen that Zeus had to rely on the Hundred-Handers to defeat the Titans. In an alternative account, which was probably of Hellenistic origin, the gods had to seek the help of two 'demi-gods' and summoned Heracles and Dionysos,⁹⁹ who had both been fathered by Zeus on mortal mothers (and could thus be said to have earned their divine status by their services to the gods on this occasion).

The two most formidable Giants were Porphyryon, who is already singled out by Pindar and Aristophanes,¹⁰⁰ and Alcyoneus, who was immortal as long as he remained on his home territory. In Apollodorus' narrative, Alcyoneus is the first victim of Heracles, who brings him down with his arrows at the beginning of the battle. Although the Giant began to recover some of his strength when he fell on to his native soil in Pallene, the hero dragged him beyond the frontiers of his land on the advice of Athena, and the Giant then expired.¹⁰¹ In the earliest account of this episode by Pindar, it seems to be detached from the general conflict, even if it is still placed in the homeland of the Giants and associated with Heracles' return from Troy. When Alcyoneus confronted him and his allies at Phlegrai, so we are told, the hero shot him down with his arrows, but not before he had destroyed twelve chariots by hurling a huge rock at them. Pindar describes him as a herdsman who was as huge as a mountain without specifying that he was a Giant.¹⁰² In another version, the encounter took place at the Isthmus of Corinth while Heracles was returning with the cattle of Geryon (see pp. 250ff), and so could definitely have no connection with the Gigantomachy;¹⁰³ and even more surprisingly, some vase-paintings from the sixth century BC show Heracles catching Alcyoneus by surprise while he is asleep on the ground, creeping up on him with club or sword in hand. Much as one would like to know how this legend developed and varied over the course of time, the evidence is thus very patchy.

We must now trace the story to its conclusion as recounted in Apollodorus' version. After the death of Alcyoneus, Porphyryon launched an attack against Heracles and Hera, but Zeus distracted him by inspiring him with a lust for Hera and then struck him with a thunderbolt as he was tearing at the goddess's robes. Although this would surely have sufficed to kill the Giant in any normal circumstances, Heracles in his role as special helper of the gods was obliged to finish him off with one of his arrows; and likewise in every succeeding case, gods would bring Giants to the ground in their various ways, leaving it for Heracles to deal the death-blow with his arrows. Since Apollo was a consummate archer like Heracles, the two of them attacked the Giant Ephialtes in conjunction, Apollo shooting him in the left eye and Heracles in the right; Dionysos and Hecate used their cultic emblems, the thyrsos and flaming torches respectively, against two other Giants, Eurytos and Clytios; Hephaistos, the divine blacksmith, pelted Mimas with missiles of red-hot iron; Athena killed the fleeing Encelados by hurling the island of Sicily on top of him, and flayed another Giant, Pallas, to use his skin as a shield; while pursuing the Giant Polybotes through the Aegean, Poseidon broke a corner off the

island of Cos and hurled it down on him, so creating the little island of Nisyros not far to the south; Hades, who wore the cap of invisibility (see p. 68) to hide himself from sight, felled another Giant, as did Artemis; the Moirai (Fates) brought two opponents down with bronze cudgels; and Zeus attacked others with thunderbolts, while Heracles shot every one of them with an arrow as they lay close to death on the ground.¹⁰⁴ Although Ares is omitted from this narrative, he appears as an adversary of the Giants, especially Mimas, in vase-paintings and other literary sources.¹⁰⁵ As for the two stories in which Giants have islands deposited on them, that in which Polybotes is buried under Nisyros probably originated in epic since it can be found in sixth century vase-paintings, while the story of Encelados with its more distant setting in the west was apparently of Hellenistic origin.¹⁰⁶

The Giants were pictured in different ways at different periods. In the earliest images from the sixth century BC, they are generally portrayed as handsome hoplite warriors who wear armour and a helmet and fight with a lance or sword (or occasionally wield rocks when necessity demands, as do Homeric warriors). Although they must obviously have been very large and powerful if they were to match themselves against the gods, they were not originally imagined as giants in the full modern sense of the word. It is significant in this respect that when an ordinary mortal is called a *gigas* in early Greek literature, as in the case of the brutal Capaneus (see p. 356) in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*,¹⁰⁷ the word is suggestive of reckless or impious violence rather than of exceptional size. In the fifth century BC, an alternative representation appears in which the Giants are depicted as wild and primitive beings who dress in animal skins or simple tunics (or are even naked) and use rocks and boulders as their usual weapons. And finally, from the Hellenistic period onwards, they are often depicted with serpent's coils for legs, as would be appropriate for earth-born beings, and are portrayed as wholly gigantic in stature.¹⁰⁸

How the Aloadae met their death after threatening to attack Olympus

The two gigantic brothers OTOS and EPHEALTES, known jointly as the ALODAE (or Aloadae in anglicized form), were the last beings who could be thought to have presented a serious threat to the Olympian order. Although they were named after their putative father Aloeus, a Thessalian hero who was a son of Canace, daughter of Aiolos, and was thus of Deucalionid descent (see p. 380), their true father was Poseidon, as their mother Iphimedeia explains to Odysseus in the *Odyssey* when he meets her in the Underworld.¹⁰⁹ Poseidon was a suitable father for such violent and immensely strong beings, who could hardly have been thought, moreover, to have been of purely mortal birth if they possessed the extraordinary qualities ascribed to them by Homer. For he reports that they were the tallest men who had ever existed, and that they grew at such a prodigious rate that they were already nine cubits across (about fourteen feet) and nine fathoms in height (about fifty feet) at the age of nine.¹¹⁰ Apollodorus provides further information about the circumstances of their birth, which has every appearance of being of early origin, saying that their mother, Iphimedeia, fell in love with Poseidon and made repeated visits to the seashore, where she would scoop water from the waves with her hands and pour it into her

lap, until the sea-god finally emerged from his watery realm and had intercourse with her.¹¹¹ In the original story, mere contact with the seawater would presumably have sufficed to cause her to become pregnant. There is also an alternative account, apparently of Hellenistic origin, that presents the Aloadaï as having been earth-born like Typhon and the Giants before them.¹¹²

After having grown to the above-mentioned dimensions by the age of nine, the Aloadaï threatened, so the *Odyssey* reports, to ‘raise the din of furious battle against the immortals themselves on Olympos’, desiring to

pile Ossa on Olympos and Pelion with its quivering foliage on to Ossa to enable them to scale the heavens; and they would have accomplished it too if they had reached the full measure of their growth, but the son of Zeus who was brought to birth by lovely-haired Leto [i.e. Apollo] killed them before the dawn could show beneath their temples and cover their chins with the bloom of a beard.¹¹³

In other words, they planned to climb up to the heavens by piling the tallest mountains in Thessaly on top of one another, and could have achieved their aim if Apollo had not killed them before they reached their full height and strength. But this tells us rather less than we might want to know. How did Apollo kill them, and where, and was it for the specific reason of preventing an assault against heaven?

A further tale is recorded of the Aloadaï in the other Homeric epic, telling how they once tied up the war-god Ares and imprisoned him in a bronze jar for thirteen months, where

Ares, insatiate of war, would indeed have perished, if their stepmother, the all-beautiful Eeriboia, had not brought news of the matter to Hermes, who then stole Ares away when he was already greatly weakened, for his cruel bonds were wearing him down.¹¹⁴

It would be interesting to know whether the Aloadaï were trying to remove Ares from the scene before launching their attack against heaven, or whether this was a wholly separate incident, perhaps a youthful prank that got out of hand. For what it is worth, Homer’s ancient commentators explain that Ares had angered the Aloadaï by killing the young Adonis (see p. 184) after Aphrodite had asked them to watch over him;¹¹⁵ but it seems most unlikely that this would have had anything to do with the original story of Ares’ imprisonment.

Apart from a passing reference in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* that tells of their birth, we next hear of the Aloadaï in Pindar, who reports for the first time that they died on the island of Naxos, but without saying anything about the circumstances. There is otherwise a fragment in which the poet talks of them as swiftly raising up a ladder to the steep sky, evidently by piling up mountains as in the usual story.¹¹⁶ In later accounts by the mythographers, they are said to have actually made a start on the enterprise (even if the mountains are apparently still in place).

The Aloadaï had special connections with Naxos, where they are reported to have been honoured in hero-cult in historical times (as has been confirmed by an inscription). In the tale that is provided by the mythographers to explain how they

came to die there, their fate is not provoked by any planned assault against heaven, but by presumption of quite another kind. For according to Apollodorus they made advances to two great goddesses, Ephialtes to Hera and Otos to Artemis, and so provoked Artemis to cause their death by means of a deception, for the goddess ran between them in the form of a deer while they were out hunting, provoking them to kill one another with their hunting-spears while trying to strike down the deer.¹¹⁷ Or, in a somewhat different version recorded by Hyginus, they tried to rape Artemis, and since she was unable to match their strength, her brother Apollo came to her aid by causing a deer to rush between them with same result as above.¹¹⁸ Apollodorus runs all the myths of the Alloadai together into a single narrative, starting with the Homeric stories (but without mentioning that Apollo was supposed to have killed them), and ending with the afore-mentioned story in which Artemis causes their death; but Hyginus draws a clear divide between the Homeric account of their death, in which they are killed by Apollo for trying to scale the heavens, and the account offered by 'other authors' in which they are killed for offending against a goddess. Although it is of course possible that Apollo was said to have killed them in the early tradition for the latter reason, before they were old enough to put their other plan into effect, it is surely more probable that two conflicting accounts came to be offered of the cause of their death.

The brothers were sometimes said to have been punished for their sins in the Underworld. According to Hyginus, they were tied back-to-back to a column with coils of snakes, and a screech-owl sat between them on top of the column.¹¹⁹ It may possibly be relevant that Otos shared his name with a kind of owl (though an eared-owl rather than a screech-owl); and the owl may perhaps have tormented them with its screeching, or by sucking their blood or tearing their flesh (for these ill-omened birds were reported to attack infants and the dead in such ways). Diodorus offers a rationalized version of the history of the Alloadai, saying that they sailed to Naxos at the bidding of their father after their mother and sister were abducted to the island, and that they seized power there, but later quarrelled and killed one another in battle.¹²⁰ It is possible that they originally came to be associated with Naxos because they were said to have gone hunting there as companions of Artemis; and that would provide a context for their offence against the goddess, as in the case of Orion, who was otherwise known as her only male hunting-companion (see p. 562). To turn to more constructive achievements, they were said to have founded Hesiod's home town of Ascrai in Boeotia, and the cult of the Muses on Mt Helicon above.¹²¹

How Prometheus deceived Zeus to advance the interests of the human race, and the creation of the first woman

PROMETHEUS, a son of the Titan Iapetos (see p. 46), revolted against the authority of his cousin Zeus, not in the hope of gaining power on his own account as in the case of Typhon and the Giants, but to bring benefits and justice to the human race; and by resorting to subterfuge rather than the use of force, he achieved a considerable measure of success, even if he had to pay a heavy penalty afterwards. The myth of Prometheus was altered and developed significantly as time progressed.

In the Hesiodic poems, he advances the interests of mortals in two specific respects alone and suffers for his actions ever afterwards, while in the later tradition from Aeschylus onwards, he is the general benefactor (and sometimes even the creator and saviour) of the human race, and he is eventually freed from his punishment and reconciled with Zeus. We will start with Hesiod's account of his story in the *Theogony*.

When gods and mortals ceased to associate directly and eat together, a new relationship was established in which mortals would sacrifice animals to the gods and share the meat of the victim with them without meeting face to face. According to Greek custom, the flesh and offal of the victims would be eaten after the sacrifice while their bones would be wrapped in fat and burned on the altar for the gods. To explain this arrangement, which seems to work to the disadvantage of the gods, Hesiod offers the following story. When the gods and mortals had quarrelled over the matter in the earliest times at Mecone (later Sicyon), Prometheus, for some unexplained reason, settled the dispute to the advantage of mortals by working a deception on Zeus. He killed an ox, cut it up, and separated the flesh and entrails from the bones; and he then covered the flesh and entrails with the ox's stomach to make that portion look unappetizing, and concealed the bones under a layer of shining fat. Although the poet tries to safeguard the wisdom of Zeus by saying that he was not really fooled, we are told that Zeus reached for the more appealing portion in any case, condemning the gods to receive the worse share at animal sacrifices ever afterwards.¹²²

Zeus was so angered by the deception that he withheld the gift of fire from the race of mortals. But Prometheus came to their aid once again by stealing some fire from heaven in the dry, pithy stalk of a fennel-plant (*narthex*, i.e. *ferula communis*, a relative of the British cow parsley whose stems contain a slow-burning white pith). Zeus responded to this second provocation by imposing a second punishment on mortal men (for there were no women as yet) and by consigning Prometheus to everlasting torment. As man's price for the stolen fire, Zeus arranged for the creation of a 'beautiful evil' (*kalon kakon*), the first woman. Hephaistos fashioned her from moistened earth at Zeus's order, and Athena clothed her in silvery robes and an embroidered veil and adorned her with garlands and a golden crown of Hephaistos' workmanship. She was then brought before an assembly of men and gods, who wondered at the sight of her, realizing that she would be an irresistible snare for men. In the present account from the *Theogony*, in which the first woman is left unnamed, Hesiod says nothing about her subsequent life, but simply expatiates with some ardour on the miseries that women and marriage have brought to men ever since. To avoid marriage brings no benefit either, since Zeus has also ensured that men who do so will face a miserable old age.¹²³ As for Prometheus, Zeus had him bound to a pillar with unbreakable bonds and sent an eagle against him each day to gnaw at his liver, which grew afresh each night. Although he was eventually released from this specific torment when Heracles shot the eagle (see p. 257), an exploit that was permitted by Zeus because it would bring glory to his son, there is no suggestion that Prometheus was freed from his bonds as in most later accounts.¹²⁴

Hesiod offers a more detailed account of the myth of the first woman in his *Works*

and Days. The centre of interest in this version is rather different, since the poet is primarily concerned to explain why men live a life of toil after the life of ease that they were supposed to have enjoyed in the earliest times (see pp. 30–1), when a day's work would have been sufficient to provide for a whole year. Prometheus and his benefactions were to blame as in the *Theogony*, for he angered Zeus by deceiving him (presumably over the sacrifices, although this is not stated), and so provoked him to bring disadvantage to men by hiding fire away from them; and when Prometheus then remedied the situation by stealing some fire for them, Zeus responded by sending the first woman to bring trouble to men.¹²⁵ At the bidding of Zeus, Hephaistos mixed some earth and water together to fashion a young woman who was as beautiful as the immortal goddesses. Athena dressed and adorned her, and taught her needlework and weaving; Aphrodite bestowed grace and allure on her; the Charites (Graces) and Peitho (as the personification of amorous persuasion) decked her with jewellery; the Horai (Seasons) crowned her with spring flowers; and Hermes finally taught her all manner of guile and deceit, and granted her the gift of speech. He named her PANDORA (*pan*, all, *dōra*, gifts) because all the Olympians were presenting her to men as a gift and affliction.¹²⁶ Zeus now ordered Hermes to take her to Epimetheus (Afterthought), the foolish brother of Prometheus, who accepted her as a wife even though he had been warned by Prometheus never to accept a gift from Zeus in case it should bring harm to men. Only afterwards, when it was too late, did he understand the implications of what he had done.¹²⁷ Rather strangely in view of the divine status of Epimetheus, this marriage is the means by which Pandora is introduced into the human race. The *Theogony* states likewise that Epimetheus brought harm to men by accepting the woman from Zeus.¹²⁸ It is stated in the later tradition that Pandora bore him a daughter, Pyrrha, the first woman to be born by natural process, who married her cousin Deucalion (see p. 373).

After arriving among mortals, Pandora opened the lid of a great jar that she had with her, causing a host of evils and diseases to be released among mortals for the first time; for until that moment, men had lived on the earth free from toil and sickness and other ills. Hesiod says nothing about the origin of the jar; presumably she had brought it with her from the gods. Through the will of Zeus, she replaced the lid of the jar before Elpis (Hope) could fly out. Even if the narrative is not entirely logical at this point (for Hope should properly have been allowed out with all the evils if she was to live among mortals), this surely means that hope is to be reserved for mortals as a palliative.¹²⁹ This motif of the jar of evils was presumably borrowed from fable or folklore; a related notion can be found in the *Iliad*, when it states that Zeus possesses two urns from which he can dispense ills or blessings to mortals.¹³⁰

For significant developments in the mythology of Prometheus, we have to wait until *Prometheus Bound*, a tragedy of the fifth century BC that is ascribed to Aeschylus (but may have been wholly or partially of different authorship). The drama begins as Cratos and Bia (Might and Force), two ruthless agents of Zeus, bring Prometheus forward to be chained to a rock at some unspecified place in the far north (apparently not the Caucasus). Hephaistos has accompanied them to provide his services as a blacksmith, although he is far from enthusiastic about the task and about Zeus's manner of rule.¹³¹ The immediate cause of Prometheus' punishment is

his theft of fire as in Hesiod's version,¹³² but we learn in the course of the play (which contains very little action) that he has brought many other benefits to mortals, and that at one time he has even saved them from being destroyed by a tyrannical Zeus who grudges their very existence. For although Prometheus (who is here described as a son of Gaia) had helped Zeus to power by advising him on how to defeat the Titans, he later fell out with him when Zeus not only ignored the interests of human beings after his rise to power, but wanted to eliminate them to replace them with a new race.¹³³ By daring to oppose his intent and champion the interests of mortals, Prometheus won the enduring hostility of Zeus, and subsequently compounded the offence by conferring all kinds of benefits on human beings. He taught them how to make houses from bricks and wood, to submit animals to the yoke and bridle, to cross the seas on sailing ships, and to read the heavens so as to be able to reap and sow at the right seasons; he invented the art of number for them, moreover, and writing and medicine, and the interpretation of dreams and omens, and the mining of the treasures of the earth; in short, he introduced or invented all the arts that raise human beings from a state of nature.¹³⁴ Hesiod's story of his deception over the sacrifices is conspicuously absent. Although Zeus had the power to exact a cruel revenge, Prometheus had the advantage over Zeus in one crucial respect, that his mother had told him that if Zeus fathered a child by a certain mother (i.e. Thetis, see p. 429), she would bear him a son who would be more powerful than his father.¹³⁵ Knowing that Prometheus was in possession of such a secret, Zeus sent Hermes to him after he was enchained to force him to reveal it; but he remained defiant in the face of every threat, and *Prometheus Bound* ends with him being hurled down to Tartaros.¹³⁶

This play was apparently the first in a trilogy of which the second and third plays were *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-bringer* (unless the latter was the first in the series). The action of *Prometheus Unbound* was set in the mountains of the Caucasus, where Prometheus was now tied down and was suffering the painful attentions of the above-mentioned eagle; and since the chorus was formed from his fellow Titans (who are mentioned in *Prometheus Bound* as being in Tartaros), it would seem that they had been released from Tartaros along with Prometheus himself. Heracles arrived at some stage and shot the eagle, as in the old account by Hesiod; and he then proceeded to release Prometheus from his chains, as is indicated in the title of the play. Prometheus must have appeased Zeus in the course of the play by revealing that Thetis was the goddess who was fated to bear a son who would surpass his father; but since he had been so stubborn in refusing to reveal the secret in the previous play, his change of heart was presumably motivated by something more than self-interest alone. It could well be that Zeus, who is a brutal tyrant in *Prometheus Bound*, agreed to change his ways.¹³⁷ It was commonly accepted in the subsequent tradition that Prometheus was set free by Heracles, and also that the Caucasus was the site of his punishment.¹³⁸

It was often said that Prometheus was not merely the benefactor of the human race, but the ancestor of part or all of it, or even its creator. According to a genealogy that first appears in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, he and his brother Epimetheus fathered Deucalion and Pyrrha respectively, who formed the first couple in the

Central Greek tradition (see p. 373).¹³⁹ Since both of the relevant sources are corrupt, we cannot tell who was named as Deucalion's mother in the *Catalogue*. *Prometheus Bound* and Acusilaus agree that Prometheus was married to an Oceanid called Hesione (although Herodotus identifies his wife as Asia, who is his mother in the *Theogony*, and various other names are suggested in later sources).¹⁴⁰ The idea that Prometheus created the first human beings by moulding them from clay first appears in the Hellenistic period;¹⁴¹ this would at least explain why he should have wished to act as their champion. According to a local tradition at Panopeus in Phocis, two clay-coloured rocks that could be seen there were formed from the clay that was left over when Prometheus had created the human race, hence their remarkable smell, which resembled that of human flesh.¹⁴² It has been plausibly suggested that Prometheus originated as a trickster figure of non-moral character who liked to pit his wits against those of Zeus, and that because he was sometimes represented as tricking Zeus to the advantage of human beings, he came to acquire a new and distinctive moral role as their benefactor and defender.

Prometheus was honoured in cult at Athens in particular, as a patron of the arts of fire that were so important to that city; he was thought to preside over pottery above all, while Hephaistos (another god who was especially honoured at Athens, see p. 178) presided over metalwork. Torch races were held in his honour at his Athenian festival of the Prometheia, and there was an altar to him as Fire-bringer (Pyrphoros) at the Academy.¹⁴³

Notes

1 Hes. *Theog.* 453–67.

2 Ibid. 467–95.

3 Paus. 10.24.5.

4 Hes. *Theog.* 501–6.

5 Ibid. 617–735.

6 Ibid. 886–900, cf. Apollod. 1.3.6.

7 *Hom. Hymn Demeter* 85–86, Pi. *Ol.* 7.54ff.

8 Apollod. 1.1.1–1.2.1.

9 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.289–91, Aesch. fr. 190–3 Radt.

10 Hes. *Theog.* 477–84.

11 Dicte and Ida cited as alternative locations, Call. *Hymn* 1.4–6; Ida the earlier, e.g. Pi. *Ol.* 5.40–1, Dicte first in Call. l.c., A.R. 1.509 and 1130, Arat. 33 (where erroneously placed near Ida).

12 E.g. Musaeus 2B8 DK (from Eratosth. 13), Ov. *Fast.* 5.111–21, Hyg. *Fab.* 139.

13 Call. *Hymn* 1.46–9.

14 Apollod. 1.1.6–7 (Adrasteia and Ida, daughters of Melisseus, fed Zeus on milk of Amaltheia), Hyg. *Astr.* 2.13 (similar, but daughters of Melisseus not named); cf. A.R. 3.132–6 (Adrasteia nurse of Zeus, made beautiful ball for him), D.S. 5.70.3 (nymphs not named), schol. *Od.* 5.272 and schol. Arat. 46 (Helice and Cynosura).

15 E.g. Athen. 375f, 491a.

16 Call. *Hymn* 1.51–3 (earliest surviving source), D.S. 5.65.4, Apollod. 1.1.7, Lucretius 2.633–9, Ovid *Fasti* 4.207–10 (here with Corybantes, see p. 219). See also Epimenides 3B22, Eur. fr. 472 Nauck, Corinna 654.12–6.

17 Hyg. *Fab.* 139.

18 Paus. 8.38.2–3, 8.41.2.

19 Paus. 4.33.1.

20 Ant. Lib. 19.

21 Eratosth. 13, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.13.

- 22 Schol. Arat. 46.
23 Eratosth. 30, Hyg. Astr. 2.16.
24 Hes. *Theog.* 922–9.
25 Hom. *Od.* 8.312 (Hephaistos indicates that he has *two* parents) with *Il.* 1.577–9, 14.338.
26 Hom. *Il.* 5.855–98.
27 Hom. *Il.* 13.301, *Od.* 8.361; cf. Hdt. 5.7, Soph. *Antig.* 969–70, Call. *Hymn* 4.63–5, etc.
28 Hom. *Il.* 5.855–67.
29 Ibid. 21.391–414.
30 Ibid. 5.840–5.
31 Hes. *Shield* 357–67, 424–66.
32 Hom. *Il.* 5.384–91.
33 Ibid. 5.333 and 592–3; as mother or daughter of Ares, schol. *Il.* 5.337, Cornutus 21; her statue in temple of Ares at Athens, Paus. 1.8.5.
34 Hom. *Il.* 4.440, 15.119–20; 13.299 (Phobos a son of Ares), Hes. *Theog.* 933–6 (Deimos and Phobos his sons by Aphrodite); Hes. *Shield* 463–6 (D. and P. his charioteers); cult of Phobos at Sparta, Plut. *Cleomenes* 8–9.
35 Cydoimos and Ker, Hom. *Il.* 18.535–40, cf. Hes. *Shield* 156–60. For Cydoimos, see also *Il.* 5.591–3, Q.S. 1.307–11.
36 Hes. *Theog.* 933–7.
37 Simon. 575, Cic. *N.D.* 3.22, etc.
38 Hom. *Il.* 4.2–3, 5.722 and 5.905 respectively.
39 Hes. *Theog.* 950–5, Hom. *Od.* 602–4.
40 E.g. Hom. *Il.* 11.270, Paus. 1.44.3 (sanctuary of Eileithuia at Megara).
41 Paus. 6.20.2–6.
42 Hes. *Theog.* 886–920.
43 Hes. *Theog.* 886–900, cf. Apollod. 1.3.6.
44 Hes. fr. 343.
45 Hes. *Theog.* 901–6.
46 Proclus on *Cypria*, Hom. *Hymn* 23 to *Cronos* 2–3.
47 Pi. fr. 30 SM.
48 On succession at Delphi, e.g. Aesch. *Eum.* 1–8, Paus. 10.5.3.
49 Hom. *Il.* 15.87–9, 20.4–6, *Od.* 2.68–9.
50 Hes. *Theog.* 907–11.
51 Ibid. 912–4.
52 Ibid. 915–7.
53 Ibid. 918–20.
54 Hes. *Theog.* 353, 17.
55 Hom. *Il.* 5.370–4.
56 Hom. *Hymn.* *Apollo* 93.
57 Str. 7.7.12.
58 Pher. 3F90, Apollod. 1.1.3.
59 Pi. *Ol.* 10.49, Hdt. 2.7, 6.108, Thuc. 6.54.
60 E.g. Schol. A.R. 2.533.
61 Schol. Pi. *Ol.* 5.10a (= Herodorus 31F34a).
62 Hom. *Il.* 14.313–28.
63 Hom. *Il.* 15.307–10, 2.447–9 respectively.
64 Hom. *Il.* 17.593–6, 4.164–8.
65 Athena, Hom. *Il.* 2.456–52, 5.733–42, 18.203–6, 21.400–2; Apollo, 15.229–30 with 318–22, and 24.18–21.
66 Hom. *Il.* 15.18–22.
67 Hom. *Il.* 8.19–27.
68 Ibid. 1.396–405.
69 Hes. *Theog.* 820–3.
70 Apollod. 1.6.1–3.
71 Hes. *Theog.* 823–35.
72 Ant. Lib. 28, citing Nicander.
73 Apollod. 1.6.3.
74 Hes. *Theog.* 836–68.
75 Ibid. 869–80.

- 76 Pi. Fr. 91 SM.
- 77 Ant. Lib. 28, citing Nicander, cf. Ov. *Met.* 5.318–31.
- 78 Hom. *Il.* 15.237, Arist. *Birds* 516.
- 79 Hdt. 2.156.
- 80 Ov. *Met.* 5. 329.
- 81 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.28.
- 82 Apollod. 1.6.3.
- 83 Hom. *Il.* 2.781–3.
- 84 Hes. *Theog.* 304.
- 85 See West on *Theog.* l.c.
- 86 Pi. *Pyth.* 8.16, *Pyth.* 1.16–17, cf. Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 351–2.
- 87 J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton 1955, 125–6.
- 88 Pi. *Pyth.* 1.19–29, Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 363–7.
- 89 Pher. 3F54.
- 90 Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 305–55, cf. Stes. 239 for circumstances of birth.
- 91 Hes. *Theog.* 180–6.
- 92 Claudian *Gigantomachy* 6–14.
- 93 Hes. *Theog.* 954.
- 94 Hom. *Od.* 10.119–20, 7.201–6, 7.58–60 respectively.
- 95 Xenophanes 21B1.19–24.
- 96 Pi. *Nem.* 1.67–9, *Pyth.* 8.12–13, Hes. fr. 43a.63–5.
- 97 E.g. Paus. 8.29.1, D.S. 4.21.5–7 (cf. 5.71.4) respectively.
- 98 Apollod. 1.6.1.
- 99 Schol. Pi. *Nem.* 1.101.
- 100 Pi. *Pyth.* 8.12–3, Arist. *Birds* 1249–52.
- 101 Apollod. 1.6.1.
- 102 Pi. *Isth.* 6.31–5, *Nem.* 4.25–30.
- 103 Schol. Pi. *Nem.* 4.43.
- 104 Apollod. 1.6.2.
- 105 A.R. 3.1225–7, Claudian *Gigantomachy* 85–91.
- 106 Euripides mentions that Encelados fell to Athena, *Madness of Heracles* 906–9. The Sicilian location may have been introduced by Callimachus, see fr. 1 and schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 4.11.
- 107 Aesch. *Seven* 424, cf. Ag. 692 (Zephyros).
- 108 Snake-legged, Apollod. 1.6.1 (a late feature of his account), Ov. *Met.* 1.184, Claudian *Gigantomachy* 80–1; Paus. 8.29.3 regards the notion as absurd.
- 109 Hom. *Od.* 11.305–8.
- 110 Hom. *Od.* 11.309–12.
- 111 Apollod. 1.7.4.
- 112 Schol. A.R. 1.482, citing Eratosthenes.
- 113 Hom. *Od.* 11.305–320.
- 114 Hom. *Il.* 5.385–91.
- 115 Schol. *Il.* 5.385.
- 116 Pi. fr. 162SM.
- 117 Apollod. 1.7.4.
- 118 Hyg. *Fab.* 28; Verg. *Aen.* 6.582 indicates that they were punished in Tartarus, but gives no details.
- 119 Hyg. *Fab.* 28.
- 120 D.S. 5.50.6–55.2, cf. Parthen. 19.
- 121 Paus. 9.29.1–2.
- 122 Hes. *Theog.* 535–60.
- 123 Ibid. 561–612.
- 124 Ibid. 521–31.
- 125 Hes. *W.D.* 42–58
- 126 Ibid. 59–82.
- 127 Ibid. 83–9.
- 128 Hes. *Theog.* 511–4.
- 129 Hes. *W.D.* 90–105.
- 130 Hom. *Il.* 24.525–33.

- 131 Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 1–87.
- 132 Ibid. 7–11, 107–13.
- 133 Ibid. 197–241.
- 134 Ibid. 441–506.
- 135 Ibid. 907–19, with 209–13, 515–25; the secret is obscurely indicated rather than directly stated.
- 136 Ibid. 944–1093.
- 137 Aesch. *Prom. Unbound*, fr.; in Caucasus, fr 199 Radt (from Str. 4.1.7), tormented there by eagle, fr. 193 (see Cic. *Tusc.* 2.22–5), chorus of Titans, fr. 190.
- 138 Apollod. 1.7.1, 2.5.11, D.S. 4.15.2, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.15, etc.
- 139 Hes. fr. 2.
- 140 Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 560, Acus. 2F34.
- 141 Philemon 89, Horace *Ode* 1.16.13–6, Apollod. 1.7.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 142.
- 142 Paus. 10.4.3.
- 143 Paus. 1.30.2, schol. Soph. *Oed. Col.* 55.

5

Hades, Demeter, and the mythology of the Underworld

Zeus had two brothers, Poseidon and Hades, and three sisters, Hera, Demeter and Hestia. When the world was divided between Zeus and his two brothers after the defeat of the Titans (see pp. 67–8), Poseidon and Hades were allotted realms of their own, the seas and the Underworld respectively, and so acquired sovereign status within their specific domains, even if Zeus retained ultimate power as the king of the gods. Zeus also had his special domain, of course, as the lord of the heavens. Through the possession of these separate kingdoms, the gods of this older generation were set apart from the younger Olympian gods, who had no comparable domains. Since Hades withdrew to his subterranean realm after receiving it in the draw and rarely left it thereafter, he led an isolated existence, having little to do with his fellow gods or the world of the living. His only myth of any real importance, which told how he abducted Demeter's daughter Persephone to make her his wife, was also the main myth of Demeter herself, since she engaged in an eventful search for her daughter and eventually reached a compromise with Hades over her daughter's fate. Although Hades' role in myth was inevitably limited and specialized, the mythology of the Underworld and afterlife is both rich and exceptionally interesting, not least because it evolved in many notable respects over the course of time. We will examine that body of myth in the present chapter, in conjunction with the partly interconnected mythology of Hades and the corn-goddess Demeter, to complete our survey of how the world was supposed to have become ordered and governed, and will pass on to the three remaining Olympian deities of the first generation, Hera, Poseidon, and Hestia, in the next chapter.

Hades, Persephone, and Demeter

The grim lord of the Underworld

After winning the Underworld as his special domain, HADES lived apart from the other gods and had little to do with the affairs of the living. As the ruler of the dead, he was grim and sombre in his character and functions alike, acting rather like a jailer in so far as he ensured that the dead who entered his realm never escaped back

to the light of day, and in so far as he presided over a place of punishment where some who had gravely offended the gods, or wrongdoers more generally, according to later ideas, would be subjected to torment or to corrective punishment. Hades was not pictured, however, as being in any way malevolent or satanic, but merely as being stern and inexorable in the performance of his duties. Hesiod describes him accordingly as having a pitiless heart, and Homer as being implacable and unbending, and in that respect he could be seen as cruel and as the deity who is most hateful to mortals.¹

The name of the lord of the Underworld appears as Hades in its familiar Attic guise, or as Aïdes or Aidoneus (or as Aidon and Aidi in the genitive and dative only, probably from *Ais) in epic usage. The Greeks assumed that Aïdes simply means 'the Unseen' or 'Invisible'² (*a-ides*; the *a* is privative like 'un-' in English), and were quite possibly correct in doing so, although this remains an open question, and some would argue for instance that the name is related to *aia*, earth. In classical usage, the name of the god of the Underworld was not applied directly to his realm, which was properly the abode or house of Hades in Greek (for in an inflected language of that kind, the distinction could be indicated by use of the genitive form of his name without need of an accompanying noun). Since wealth comes from the depths of the ground in the form of crops and minerals, the Greeks often referred to Hades under the title of Plouton (the Wealthy or Wealth-giver), at least from the fifth century BC onwards. As Plato remarks, it was fear that caused people to call him by such a name, and this was of course a euphemistic title, other such titles being Polydegmon, Polydectes or Polyxeinos (all meaning the receiver or host of many, and hence the Hospitable), or Eubouleus (Wise in Counsel) or Clymenos (the Renowned). Whether to avoid ill-omened remarks or to pass over unpleasant realities, the Greeks generally preferred not to speak directly of death in connection with themselves or their friends, and would say that someone had 'departed' (*bēbēken*) or refer to the dead person as the 'blessed one' (*ho makaristēs*), or even begin such matter-of-fact documents as wills with the formula 'All will go well; but if anything should happen, I make the following dispositions',³ and they would refer to Hades by euphemistic titles for much the same reason. As the absolute ruler of a realm that was set apart from the rest of the world, Hades could also be called Zeus Katachthonios (Zeus of the Underworld) or simply 'the Other Zeus'.

Since the Romans had no death-god of their own, or had forgotten him if they ever did have one, they took over the Greek name Plouton (Latinized to Pluto) as their title for that deity, or else translated it by Dis, the contracted form of the Latin word *dives* (wealth). The name of his consort was corrupted into Proserpina, and nothing was added to the existing mythology of either. Hades was worshipped almost nowhere in Greece; in connection with his precinct and temple at Elis, which were opened on a single day in the year and were closed to all but the priest even then, Pausanias remarks that he knows of no one else who worships him.⁴ There is mention, however, of a precinct of Hades at Triphylian Pylos (and it has been argued that the Clymenos who had a temple at Hermione can be identified with Hades).⁵ Dis and Proserpina were honoured in cult at Rome from the time the Romans first became acquainted with the Greek deities. Hades is represented relatively

infrequently in Greek art. When he is, he often carries a sceptre or key as a sign of his authority (or else a cornucopia in his nature as Plouton), and his form and features differ very little from those of Zeus, save in expression; Seneca describes the difference epigrammatically when he says of him *vultus est illi Iouis, sed fulminantis*, 'he has the look of Jove himself, but of Jove when he thunders'.⁶

The main myth of the god Hades, which was also the main myth of Demeter as has already been noted, is that it tells how he ventured into the upper world to abduct Persephone as his bride. He rarely left his kingdom otherwise, if at all. Probably as the result of a misinterpretation of a passage in the *Iliad*, the idea arose that he was wounded by Heracles at Pylos while helping to defend the city against him or while assembling the dead,⁷ see further on p. 263; and according to a minor myth from a very late source, he once abducted an Ocean-nymph called LEUCE from the upper world to make her his mistress, and was so distressed when she subsequently died that he caused the white poplar (*leukē*) to grow up in her memory in the Elysian Fields (here regarded as part of the Underworld).⁸ If Hades was disinclined to venture above, his fellow gods, who shunned all contact with death and the dead, were no more willing to visit him in his own realm, with the exception of Hermes, who ventured into the Underworld when his duties as a messenger demanded it, and conducted the dead to the boundary-river at least (see pp. 101–2). Hades had little occasion to become involved in the affairs of living mortals; at the most, it is suggested in two passages in the *Iliad* that he and Persephone might respond through the agency of the Erinyes (Furies) if mortals prayed to them to fulfil curses (see p. 98).⁹ A few heroes were indeed said to have ventured into his realm while they were still alive, but they placed themselves under his direct authority by doing so, and he sometimes proved gracious, as in the case of Heracles and Orpheus (see pp. 254 and 565), and sometimes less so, as in the case of Theseus and Peirithoos (see p. 315). He also played some part in heroic myth in so far as he granted temporary leave of absence to heroes such as Protesilaos (see p. 466) and Sisyphos (who abused the privilege, see p. 533–4).

How Hades abducted Persephone as his bride, and her mother Demeter set out in search of her

When the time came for Hades to seek a wife, he chose to take PERSEPHONE, the only daughter of his sister DEMETER, who was the goddess of corn and of agriculture in general, and patroness of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Since he stole Persephone from the upper world in secret from her mother, who was greatly distressed by her disappearance and made every effort to recover her, the ancient myth that tells of the abduction and all that resulted from it is the principal myth of Demeter too, as well as of Hades and of the maiden herself. In the end, a compromise was reached in which Persephone spent part of the year below with Hades and part in the upper world with her mother. Persephone was a goddess of twofold character accordingly, being on the one hand the awesome queen of the dead, and on the other hand a goddess of the fertility of the earth in conjunction with Demeter. She was often closely associated with her mother in cult, so much so

that the pair could be referred to simply as the Two Goddesses (*tō Theō*) or the two Demeters or two Thesmophoriai. Persephone was also known as Kore (the Girl) in cult. Although the latter part of Demeter's name certainly means mother, the meaning of the first syllable is a matter for conjecture; the once-popular idea, already current in antiquity, that the name means 'Earth Mother' has come to be regarded as ill-founded.

The story of the abduction of Persephone, and of her mother's search for her, is recounted as follows in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, which provides the earliest and fullest account. While the maiden was once gathering flowers with her companions, Earth caused a wonderful flower to spring up in her path at the bidding of Zeus and to gratify Hades, a bloom of unparalleled beauty and fragrance; and when Persephone reached forward to pluck it, the ground opened up and Hades rushed out in his golden chariot to seize her and carry her down to the Underworld. Although the Hymn names the Nysian plain, a purely mythical place, as the site of the abduction, the incident was usually placed in Sicily in the later tradition. Persephone's cries were heard by Hecate and Helios alone. Her mother soon grew anxious and hurried off in search of her, but could find no news of her, whether from gods or mortals or birds of omen. So, lighting two torches (from the flames of Etna according to a later tradition), Demeter wandered the world for nine days, fasting all the while, until she met Hecate, who told her that she had heard her daughter crying out; and the two goddesses went off to consult the sun-god Helios, who can see everything from his vantage point in the sky. When Helios disclosed that Hades had abducted Persephone with the connivance of Zeus, Demeter was so upset and angry that she abandoned the company of the gods and hid herself among mortals in the guise of an old woman.¹⁰

After long wanderings, she arrived at Eleusis (to the north-west of Athens), and sat down by a well called Parthenion (the Maiden Well). When the daughters of Celeos, the king of the town, saw her there while fetching water and addressed her courteously, saying that she could be sure of a welcome from the women of the town, she led them to believe that she was an old woman who had been abducted from Crete by pirates, and asked them to help her to find some work. So they went off to consult their mother, Metaneira, who told them to invite the old woman home to act as nursemaid to her infant son Demophoon. After entering the palace, Demeter sat in disconsolate silence until her spirits were lifted by the jokes of a certain Iambe, who caused her to laugh for the first time since the loss of her daughter; and when Metaneira then offered her some wine, she asked for *kykeōn* instead, a drink containing barley-meal and pennyroyal. Coarse humour and raillery had their place in the Eleusinian Mysteries, as did the use of *kykeōn* as a ritual drink; in accounts from the later tradition, a woman called Baubo awoke the laughter of the goddess by raising her skirts to expose herself.¹¹

To repay Metaneira for her kindness, the goddess set out to confer immortality on her nursling, by rubbing him with ambrosia each day and by immersing him in a fire each night to burn away all that was mortal in his body. Her plan succeeded satisfactorily until Metaneira saw her burying the infant in the fire one night and cried out in dismay. Enraged by this unexpected interference, the goddess threw the

child to the ground and rebuked the queen, telling her that she was Demeter and would have rendered her child immortal if it had not been for her meddling. But he would enjoy everlasting honour nonetheless, so she said, because he had been associated with her, and she ordered that a great temple and altar should be erected there in her honour, saying that she herself would instruct the people of the town in her rites and so enable them to win her favour. She then resumed her proper form as a goddess, filling the house with a lovely fragrance and with light as bright as that of lightning, and so left the scene. On being told of this, Celeos summoned his people together and ordered them to fulfil her instructions, and so prepared the way for the founding of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the secret rites of which were taught directly to Celeos and other leading men of the city by the goddess herself.¹²

As long as Demeter was absent from Olympus and in mourning, the earth was infertile and famine-stricken, for without her influence nothing could grow or reach maturity. After the completion of her temple at Eleusis, she remained there grieving for a year, until the gods came to fear that the human race would die of hunger and that they would be deprived of their sacrifices as a consequence. So Zeus sent the divine messenger Iris to Demeter to instruct her to return to Olympus, but she refused to obey; and when he then sent all the other gods to her one after another to offer her handsome gifts and whatever she might desire, she still refused to change her mind, declaring that she would never set foot on Olympus nor allow the crops to spring forth until she had seen her daughter with her own eyes. Faced with this ultimatum, Zeus was obliged to send Hermes to the lord of the Underworld to ask him to release Persephone. Hades acceded to his brother's request, but secretly induced Persephone to eat a pomegranate seed (or seeds in some later accounts) before she left, and so ensured that she would remain bound to his realm forever. When Demeter learned of this from her daughter after they were reunited, she realized that she would have to accept a compromise, and agreed to Zeus's proposal that Persephone should spend a third of the year in the world below as the consort of Hades, and the other two-thirds with her mother and the Olympian gods (see [Figure 5.1](#)). It is evidently to be imagined that Persephone spends the winter season away when the crops and vegetation are dormant, and returns at the beginning of the seasons of growth, as is indicated clearly enough in the Homeric hymn where it states that she emerged from the realm of darkness each year 'when the earth blossoms with spring flowers of every kind'.¹³ Or in some later accounts, it was agreed that Persephone should spend half of the year below and half in the upper world.¹⁴ Now that a settlement had been reached, Demeter restored fertility to the earth, and fulfilled her promise to the Eleusinians by instructing their leading men of the city in her rites and mysteries.¹⁵ It was often claimed in later times that Demeter first bestowed the gift of grain after she was reunited with her daughter, and the Athenians liked to boast that they had been the first to receive the gift (i.e. at Eleusis) and had been generous enough to pass it on to others.



Figure 5.1. Demeter and Kore. The Eleusis relief, fifth century BC. Eleusis Museum. Photo courtesy of Richard Stoneman.

In the original version of the story, the mere action of eating from the pomegranate in the world below sufficed to bind Persephone to that world forever; but it is suggested in some later accounts that this fate came to be imposed on her because an inhabitant of the Underworld bore witness to the fact that she had eaten there. The fateful secret was disclosed by a certain ASCALAPHOS, who was a son of Acheron by the Underworld nymph Gorgyra or Orphne. Persephone was so enraged that she sprinkled him with water from an infernal river, the Phlegethon, causing him to be transformed into an ill-omened bird of the dark, the screech-owl.¹⁶ Or in another version, Demeter punished him by confining him under a heavy rock, and transformed him into an owl later when Heracles rolled the rock aside during his visit to the Underworld (see p. 254).¹⁷

Two further transformation myths came to be attached to the myth of the abduction and search. According to a tale recounted by Nicander, and later retold by

Ovid, an old woman called Misme offered refreshment to Demeter in Attica when she grew thirsty during her search, inviting Demeter into her cottage and giving her some *kykeōn*, the drink mentioned above, which contained herbs and barley. The goddess drank it down so eagerly that the woman's impudent son, ASCALABOS, laughed at her greed, and she was so enraged that she threw the remains of her drink into his face and transformed him into a spotted gecko (*ascalabos*), a little house-lizard that is still blotched with the marks left by the barley-meal from the *kykeōn*.¹⁸ This tale was plainly inspired by an episode in the Homeric hymn in which Demeter breaks her fast by drinking *kykeōn* that is brought to her by Metaneira.¹⁹ The second of these transformations is connected with the abduction itself. When Persephone was carried below by Hades, MINTHE (or Menthe), a nymph of the Underworld who had formerly been his mistress, boasted that she was more beautiful than Persephone and would soon win her lover back. Demeter was so angered by her presumption that she trampled her into the ground, and a mint-plant (*minthē*) sprang up in place of her; or else she was transformed into the herb by Persephone herself.²⁰

As might be expected, there were many competing traditions about the location of the site of Persephone's abduction. The Cretans liked to believe, for instance, that she had been abducted from their island, while the idea inevitably suggested itself on the other hand that she had been seized near Eleusis.²¹ Or according to an Arcadian legend, she disappeared into a chasm on Mt Cyllene above the city of Pheneos, and when informed of that fact by the people of the city, Demeter rewarded them by granting that they should never lose more than a hundred men in any war.²² The Argives claimed for their part that she was abducted near Lerna in the Argolid,²³ and that Demeter had in fact revealed her rites to them first of all, having been informed of that fact by a certain Chrysanthis, the wife of Pelasgos, the primordial ruler of the land; it was only at a later time, so they claimed, that Demeter's mysteries came to be introduced to Eleusis, when the Argive hierophant (initiatory priest) quarreled with the current king of Argos and fled to Attica.²⁴

In Hellenistic and later times, however, it came to be very widely accepted that Persephone had been abducted from Sicily, which was famed for its rich cornlands. According to one account, Hades opened up a chasm in the region of Syracuse to take her below, and caused the spring of Cyane (the Azure Spring) to gush forth at the spot.²⁵ In Ovid's version of this story, the spring was already in existence, and CYANE, its resident nymph, tried to block the path of Hades as he was carrying Persephone away, protesting that she should not be forced to become his wife against her will; but the god directed his chariot straight into her pool, hurling his sceptre into the bottom to open up a breach in the earth. Cyane was so upset by the fate of Persephone and her own humiliation that she wasted away with weeping, finally melting into the waters that she had presided over.²⁶ Others said that Kore had been abducted from the meadows around Enna or Henna at the very centre of the island, and that Hades had emerged from a grotto nearby that communicated with the Underworld. The people of Enna claimed that Demeter and her daughter had been born there, and that Demeter had first discovered corn there.²⁷ It seems likely enough that in this very fertile region a corn-goddess of some kind would have

been honoured in local cult before any Greek had settled there.

Persephone appears quite frequently in myth as the awesome queen of the Underworld. It was assumed from the time of Homer onwards that she wielded considerable authority in that realm, joining together with her husband to make decisions with regard to the dead or to living heroes who ventured below, and even acting on her own initiative on occasion. It is suggested in the *Iliad* that she could be invoked in curses, and act in response to them in conjunction with Hades (see p. 94); and in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus prays to dread Persephone along with Hades when approaching the Underworld, and she subsequently sends shades of prominent dead women to him, and then disperses them after he has spoken with them. Odysseus is seized with horror, moreover, at the end of his visit because he comes to fear that Persephone may send some horrible bogey against him.²⁸ Most intriguingly, it is stated that it was she who had granted Teiresias his special privilege of retaining his wits after death (see p. 364), apparently on her own authority.²⁹ She is occasionally presented in subsequent sources as making independent decisions with regard to mortals in the Underworld, whether in allowing the dead Sisyphos to return to the upper world, or in allowing Heracles to depart with Cerberos or Orpheus with Eurydice.³⁰ As we will see (p. 314), Theseus and Peirithoos entered the Underworld with the specific purpose of abducting her. She is hardly mentioned in connection with events in the upper world; the only tale worth citing is the one in which she competes with Aphrodite for custody of the young Adonis (see p. 184).

The mythology of the Underworld

The gloomy land of the dead

We must now go on to examine the mythology of the subterranean realm of Hades, by considering how his kingdom was imagined and portrayed at different periods, how the dead were thought to be conveyed there, and what fate they might expect to encounter after their arrival, perhaps involving punishment or reward.

Although it was commonly assumed, of course, that the kingdom of Hades lay somewhere far underground, the Greeks were also inclined to place that dark land in the far west, as already noted (p. 17), beyond the sunset. Both ideas can be found in the Homeric epics, but they need not be regarded as contradictory, since Odysseus' westward journey to the land of the dead³¹ is no more than a special means of approach to an underground realm, which might otherwise be approached through some chasm that lay much closer to home. Except in a passage in the final book of the *Odyssey*, which is almost certainly part of a later interpolation,³² there is no suggestion in Homer that the shades of the dead have to travel to the Underworld by a westward route, or indeed seek any opening in the ground. When the shade of the dead Patroclus departs after exchanging some final words with Achilles in the *Iliad*, it vanishes away under the earth like smoke; and similarly, when Patroclus and Hector die, their souls simply flit from their bodies and are gone to Hades without more ado.³³ The belief that the shades of the dead were able to pass directly below, or the

common belief of a somewhat later period that they were conducted below by Hermes, did not preclude the development of local traditions in which people claimed to have a cave, chasm, or lake in their area that communicated with the Underworld (much like the hellmouths of modern folklore). Since living mortals who wanted to descend below as fully embodied beings would necessarily have to seek an opening of this kind, these local passages were drawn into myth as the routes that were taken by great heroes of the past who visited Hades while still alive, such as Heracles, Theseus, and Orpheus. Heracles was supposed, for example, to have found his way below through a bottomless cave at Tainaron in the southern Peloponnese (see p. 314), as was Orpheus too in some accounts, this being the most famous of these passages. Or in divine myth, Dionysos was said to have descended through a bottomless lake at Lerna in the Argolid when he went to fetch his dead mother (see p. 164).

Odysseus' journey in the *Odyssey* took him into more exotic regions. After sailing west over the outer Ocean towards the sunset, he arrived at the mist-enshrouded land of the Cimmerians, a people who never see the light of the sun. He beached his ship there and made his way to the boundary of the Underworld, at a place where two infernal rivers met.³⁴ Rather than venturing inside the world of the dead, as did the heroes mentioned above, Odysseus encouraged the dead to come to him by pouring libations to them, and sacrificing a lamb and ewe over a pit to provide blood for them to drink. As the fluttering shades drank from the blood, they recovered a measure of bodily consistency and sufficient understanding to be able to converse with their visitor.³⁵ Although Homer does not attempt to describe the topography of the lower world, he alludes to its most distinctive feature, the famous meadows of asphodel; for Odysseus sees the ghost of Achilles striding off through an asphodel meadow, and sees the dead hunter Orion herding ghostly beasts across it.³⁶ Romantic though its name may sound in English, asphodel is a dingy and unprepossessing plant, which grows on barren ground, and we should imagine this accordingly as a bleak monochrome landscape that provides a suitable setting for the colourless half-life of the shades.

The abode of the dead is usually pictured as a gloomy subterranean land that contains these meadows of asphodel and also, in many subsequent accounts, groves, hills and other features of a conventional landscape. It is separated from the world of the living by a boundary-river, the Styx in the *Iliad*, but usually the Acheron in later sources.³⁷ Four infernal rivers are mentioned in the *Odyssey*, namely the **Styx**, **Acheron**, **Cocytos** (here described as a branch of the Styx) and **Pyriphlegethon** (also known as Phlegethon);³⁸ and a fifth river, **Lethe**, is added in the subsequent tradition.³⁹ Their names are significant in every case, meaning respectively the Abhorrent, the Woeful (if the name of Acheron can be rightly derived from *achos*, woe, distress), the River of Lamentation, the Fiery, and the River of Forgetfulness. The name of Pyriphlegethon originally had nothing to do with fires of punishment (even if it is mentioned as a place of torment in occasional late passages), but simply referred to the flames of the funeral pyre. Acheron was sometimes said to have issued into a swampy lake (Acherousia or the Acherousian lake);⁴⁰ its name was also used, by extension, as a poetic name for the Underworld. Hesiod mentions the Styx

alone, stating that it flows down from the Ocean taking a tenth of its water, and that the gods swear their solemn oaths by it (see further on p. 39).⁴¹

Three of these rivers had counterparts in the upper world, the Styx in Arcadia, the Cocyto in Thesprotia in north-western Greece, and the Acheron in Thesprotia and elsewhere. There was a Styx in northern Arcadia that plunged several hundred feet down a sheer cliff-face near Nonakris (at the falls now known as Mavronero), much as the infernal river is said to flow down from a tall precipice in Hesiod's account. In the earliest surviving reference to the Arcadian Styx, Herodotus mentions that the Arcadians swore oaths by it and believed that waters from the infernal river issued into it.⁴² There is no way of telling whether the traditional conception of the infernal river was influenced by knowledge of the Arcadian Styx and its falls, or whether, conversely, the Arcadian Styx was first given that name because its chilly falls resembled those of the Styx in Hesiod's description. It is no surprise that the waters of the Arcadian river should have been credited with sinister qualities. Pausanias reports, for instance, that they were reputed to bring death to animals and human beings who drank from them, and to have the power to dissolve glass, crystal, agate, stone, and even pottery, and corrupt horn, bone, and metals, including gold; and a tradition claimed that Alexander the Great was poisoned with some Styx-water that was sent over to Asia in a horse's hoof, the only substance unaffected by its powers.⁴³ The Thesprotian Acheron was also rendered impressive by its setting, for it flowed through deep gorges in a wild landscape, occasionally disappearing underground, and passed through a marshy lake before emerging into the Ionian Sea; it had an oracle of the dead beside it, as did another Acheron near Heracleia Pontica in Asia Minor. There was also an Acheron in southern Elis.⁴⁴

As for the other river of the Underworld, Lethe (Forgetfulness, Oblivion), an allusion in Plato's *Republic* provides the earliest evidence. It is obviously fitting that waters of that name should flow through the Underworld because it is a realm of oblivion where the dead can expect to forget all or most of their earthly experiences. A poem by Theognis remarks accordingly that Persephone brings *lēthē*, forgetfulness, to mortals by impairing their wits, and Aristophanes refers to an infernal plain of Lethe (which probably figured in Eleusinian eschatology).⁴⁵ Once the idea had arisen that waters of Lethe flowed through the Underworld, it could easily be imagined that the newly arrived dead would be deprived of their memory by drinking from them; and for those who believed in reincarnation, a further draught of Lethe prior to rebirth could explain why souls that have been reborn into earthly bodies remember nothing of the other world or of their previous incarnations. It is in the latter connection that Plato refers to a River of Forgetfulness (*Amelēta potamon*).⁴⁶ As a further thought, it might be imagined that dead persons who possess the requisite knowledge might be able to refrain from drinking from the waters of Lethe when they arrive below, and so be able to retain their full memory and understanding. Instructions on this very matter are provided on gold leaves that have been excavated from the tombs of Bacchic initiates in southern Italy and elsewhere; on one such leaf, from Hipponion on the heel of Italy, dating to about 400 BC, the initiate is told to avoid a spring on the right-hand side beneath a white cypress on entering Hades, but to drink instead from the cool waters that flow from

the lake of Mnemosyne (Memory).⁴⁷ Although the spring that is to be avoided is not explicitly named, it is evidently a spring of *lēthē*, forgetfulness. In ordinary life, people who wanted to consult the oracle of Trophonios at Lebadeia (see p. 559) would drink from two neighbouring springs, first from that of Lethe to clear their mind of all previous thoughts, and then from that of Mnemosyne so as to be able to remember what the oracle would reveal.⁴⁸

From the time of Homer onwards, the gates of Hades are another regular feature of Underworld imagery. In a battle-scene in the *Iliad*, for instance, Tlepolemos boasts that he will kill Sarpedon and cause him to ‘pass through the gates of Hades’; and the lord of the Underworld is described in that epic as the ‘warder of the gates’ (*pulartēs*).⁴⁹ These gates could be pictured as forming the entrance to the ‘house of Hades’, as the home of the dead was often called;⁵⁰ and this body of imagery was well-suited to express how entry into the world of the dead was controlled and escape prevented. On the latter point, it will be sufficient to quote some lines from Hesiod:

There [i.e. in the nether regions] stand the echoing halls of mighty Hades, god of the lower world, and of dread Persephone. A fearsome dog keeps pitiless guard in front, and has a nasty trick: he fawns on all who enter with wagging tail and both ears down, but he will not allow them to go out again, no, he keeps a careful guard and devours anyone whom he catches trying to go out through the gates of mighty Hades and dread Persephone.⁵¹

If the hell-hound Cerberos (see p. 56) guards the gates in this savage fashion, the ever-righteous Aiacos (see p. 426) was sometimes said to act as door-keeper or keeper of the keys (See [Figure 5.2](#)).



Figure 5.2. Charon and Hermes. Attic white ground lekythos 2777, c. 440 BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München, Germany.

How the dead passed below; their guide Hermes and ferryman Charon

We must now consider how the dead were supposed to make their way from this world to the other. There is no mention in the Homeric epics of anyone ferrying the dead across the boundary-river, and Hermes appears as escort of the shades in a single passage alone in the final book of the *Odyssey*. This passage describes him as guiding the shades of the dead suitors of Penelope to the other world by much the same route as was followed by Odysseus:

past the streams of Ocean they went, and past the White Rock, past the gates of the Sun and the land of dreams, and quickly reached the meadows of asphodel, where is the dwelling-place of the shades, the phantoms of the departed.⁵²

Hermes is not mentioned in this role again until the classical period when Aeschylus

speaks of him coming to fetch a dead heroine, Scylla, at the time of her death;⁵³ and the earliest evidence from the visual arts takes us only a little further back, to the end of the sixth century BC. There is in fact good reason to suppose that the relevant passage in the *Odyssey* forms part of a later addition to the epic (as was already argued by some scholars in antiquity); and if that is indeed the case, a consistent pattern can be recognized in the Homeric epics in which the dead pass to Hades of their own accord without need for a guide or ferryman. Since the shades (*psychai*) are pictured as flimsy beings who flutter around like ghosts, it could easily be imagined that they would be able to vanish beneath the earth 'like smoke' (as does the shade of Patroclus after his visit to Achilles),⁵⁴ and to flit across the boundary-river and any other barrier without any difficulty. The soul flies off like a dream and is gone, or it flits out of the dead man's body and departs to Hades without more ado, bewailing its fate.⁵⁵

In the Homeric account, however, the newly departed dead face one notable restriction with regard to their passage, namely that they cannot join the society of the dead until their earthly remains have been buried. When the shade of Patroclus appears to Achilles, he begs him to

bury me as quickly as possible, so that I may pass through the gates of Hades; the shades, the phantoms of the dead, are keeping me at bay, nor do they allow me to join them beyond the river, but I must wander in vain along the outside of the broad-gated house of Hades.⁵⁶

And when Odysseus visits the borders of the Underworld in the *Odyssey*, the first shade to approach him is that of his dead comrade Elpenor, who complains that he has been left unburied and appeals to his friend to rectify the matter, doubtless for the same reason as Patroclus.⁵⁷ The evidence from tragedy and other sources suggests that burial was no longer regarded as a precondition for entry to Hades by the classical period; this change may well have come about because Hermes and Charon, the ferryman of the dead, were now thought to preside over the process by which the departed were integrated into the world of the dead.

The ferryman CHARON first appears in vase-paintings from the second half of the fifth century BC, and is also reported to have been portrayed in Polygnotos' great painting of the Underworld, dating from the middle of that century. In describing that painting, Pausanias says that he thinks the artist was following an early epic called the *Minyas* in this connection, which described Charon as an old man who rowed the dead men's ferryboat.⁵⁸ The poem is of uncertain date, but was probably written in the late sixth or early fifth century. Euripides refers to Charon in the *Alcestis* as an evidently familiar figure who rows the dead across Acheron.⁵⁹ There are differing views on his origin, some arguing that he was a very old figure from popular belief, and others that he was a literary invention from the archaic period, as is perhaps more likely. It is also difficult to tell exactly when Hermes first acquired his role as conductor of the dead (*psychopompos*). By the fifth century in any case, the Homeric account of the passing of the dead had been displaced by another in which Hermes guided the shades of the dead to the nether regions, and Charon then

ferried them across the boundary-river (usually Acheron, occasionally Styx) into the world of the dead. As we have seen, Hermes is portrayed as conductor of the dead in the present text of the *Odyssey*; but if it can be accepted that the relevant passage forms part of a later addition to the epic (perhaps dating to the early sixth century), it is reasonable to assume that this function was first assigned to the god at some stage in the archaic period. Although the immortals generally shunned all contact with death and the dead, Hermes, as a god who was especially associated with boundaries and their transgression (see p. 175–6), could be fittingly imagined as a god who would not shrink from crossing this most forbidding of boundaries, whether as *psychopompos* or in his more ancient function as a messenger. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, for instance, Zeus sends him below to ask Hades to return Persephone to the upper world.⁶⁰ On the exceptional occasions on which the dead were permitted to make visits to the upper world, it was the duty of Hermes to escort them (as in the case of Protesilaos for instance,⁶¹ see p. 466). While acting as guide to the shades, Hermes did not lead them into their ultimate home (except in the unusual account in the final book of the *Odyssey*), but took them down to the border of the land of the dead, leaving it for Charon to convey them across the final frontier.

Charon is consistently portrayed in vase-paintings as an old or mature bearded man of unexceptional appearance, but he sometimes came to be imagined as being filthy and repulsive in the later tradition, and Vergil thus describes him as being appallingly dirty with an unkempt beard and fiery eyes, and as wearing a foul cloak by way of clothing.⁶² Aristophanes is the first author to suggest that he might demand a fee for his services, here two obols,⁶³ and it became the practice in the Hellenistic period (if not earlier) for the dead to be buried with a small coin in their mouth, Charon's obol. Except in one dubious case, no genealogy is offered for him, and he should presumably be regarded as a daimon or minor divinity. It is his duty to ensure that only those who are rightly qualified are allowed to pass into the world of the dead, and his only proper myth states accordingly that he was once thrown into chains for a year for ferrying Heracles across while still alive (when the hero was sent below to fetch Cerberos as one of his labours, see p. 254).⁶⁴ He never displaces Cerberos, who can be imagined as guarding access to Hades on the far side of the river, where mortals who cross over while still alive might be able to pacify him by tossing him a honey-cake. In the Etruscan tradition, Charun, as he is called in the local language, is a grotesque and alarming figure who stands at the entrance to the Underworld holding a large hammer in his hands, which he could doubtless apply to ensure that those who are entering are properly dead.

The witless insubstantial ghosts who throng the Underworld are the merest shadows of living human beings, lacking all that is needed for real vigorous life. All that survives from the living person is the tenuous *psychē* or 'breath-soul' (the word is related to *pyschein*, to breathe), which departs from the body at the time of death and finds its way to the world of the dead. The word 'soul' can be rather misleading in this context, since the *psyche* was originally pictured as being more like a wraith than a soul in the modern (or Platonic) sense, as a centre of consciousness, or indeed, spiritual centre. The loss of bodily substance that resulted when it took over from the living person was thought to bring about a corresponding loss of mental power.

Homer never uses the term *psychē* in connection with the mental functions of the living, referring instead to an array of ‘faculties’ that depend on the living body for their activity (such as the *thymos*, a sort of life-soul or affective centre, the *noos* or understanding, and the *phrenes*, literally the midriff). The *psychē* by contrast is the departing breath and the wraith that takes over as a continuation of the dead person’s self. It is as insubstantial as breath or smoke, but resembles the dead person in its outward appearance, and may thus be called an *eidōlon* or double. On the question of the level of consciousness of the departed *psychai*, the Homeric epics are by no means consistent, for it is suggested at times that they are wholly witless, while at other times they seem to possess some form of conscious life, and so to be capable of acting spontaneously (as would be necessary if they were to prevent the unburi'd Patroclus from entering their company, or to approach Odysseus to drink the blood that he had poured for them).⁶⁵ This is not of course an area in which logical consistency can be expected; the discrepancy may perhaps be interpreted in terms of differing perspectives, for the shades may be regarded as witless by comparison with embodied mortals, while they yet must be supposed to possess some form of attenuated consciousness if they are to be capable of forming a society of their own and communicating with one another.

Dead heroes and heroines who met with exceptional fates; the privileged few in Elysion or the Isles of the Blessed

Since the dead are not subjected to any form of posthumous judgement in the Homeric account, the mass of them share a common fate in the Underworld, living together as gibbering shades, rather like bats in a cave. Although this would certainly seem a dispiriting prospect, the dying would have nothing positively dreadful to fear, however they may have behaved in their previous life. Pindar and Aeschylus are the first authors to refer to a general judgement of the dead that might assign individuals to a happier or worse fate in accordance with their merits. Aeschylus states that sentence will be passed by ‘another Zeus’, that is to say, Hades himself (as we may also be supposed to infer from Pindar’s vague reference to an anonymous ‘somebody’);⁶⁶ but in the subsequent tradition from the time of Plato onwards, the task was usually assigned to Minos and other dead heroes who had been renowned for their justice during their earthly lives (see further on pp. 109–10). Although Minos is already portrayed in the *Odyssey* as dispensing justice to the shades with his golden sceptre in hand,⁶⁷ Homer clearly does not mean us to suppose that he is judging them for actions committed during their earthly lives; as a king among the dead, he is merely continuing his characteristic activity in the afterlife, just as the dead hunter Orion conducts a ghostly hunt (see p. 560). Only in a single connection, that of perjured oaths, does Homer ever suggest the ordinary dead might be punished below for deeds committed on this side of the grave. When Agamemnon is swearing an oath on one occasion, he invokes Zeus and the Earth and Sun as his witnesses along with ‘the Erinyes [Furies] who exact vengeance on men beneath the earth when any has sworn a false oath’; and there is a similar passage elsewhere in the *Iliad*, which refers to the punishment of dead perjurers without

naming the punishers.⁶⁸

If a few of the dead in Homer's account are assigned a better or worse fate than is reserved for most of their fellows, these are not ordinary mortals but great figures from the mythical past who are either specially favoured by the gods or, conversely, have incurred their everlasting hatred. A highly favoured few are spirited away body and soul together to Elysion, a far-off paradise at the ends of the earth, while some who have greatly offended the gods are subjected to perpetual torment in the world below. We will consider the exceptional fates of these heroes and heroines from legend, as presented by Homer and subsequent authors too, before passing on to consider post-Homeric eschatologies in which every dead mortal is assigned a better or worse fate on the basis of a posthumous judgement.

Elysion (or Elysium in Latin form) is first mentioned in a passage in the *Odyssey* in which Proteus, the old man of the sea, prophesies to Menelaos that he is destined not to die but to be conveyed by the immortals to the Elysian plain at the ends of the earth,

where fair-haired Rhadamanthys dwells and life is easiest for men; for no snow falls there, nor do strong storms blow, nor is there ever any rain, but the Ocean constantly sends up gusts of the shrill-blowing West Wind to bring coolness to its people.⁶⁹

The presence of Rhadamanthys, who has a name of pre-Hellenic origin and was associated with Crete (see p. 301), has encouraged some to argue that Elysion was a survival from Minoan belief, but this is by no means certain. Whatever its origin, it is a land in which all is perfect happiness, materially conceived but grossly so, and no one ever dies. Since this corresponds to the state of affairs in the golden age when Cronos reigned (see pp. 30–1), Cronos is sometimes said to rule Elysion in post-Homeric accounts, perhaps with Rhadamanthys as his subordinate.⁷⁰ In Homer's narrative and the early tradition in general, this abode of bliss lies somewhere far away on the earth's surface rather than in the world below, as is indeed the logical way to conceive of it, since Hades is a place for disembodied shades rather than for living persons who have been made immortal. Entrance to Elysion – or to the Isles of the Blessed (*makarōn nēsoi*), as this paradise is often called – is gained purely through divine favour, especially by heroes and heroines who are related to the gods; in the above-mentioned passage in the *Odyssey*, Menelaos is told that he will be granted this privilege because he is the husband of Helen and thus a son-in-law of Zeus. Those who are named as inhabitants of Elysion, or the Isles of the Blessed, in subsequent sources are mostly familiar heroes and heroines from early epic, such as Achilles (sometimes with Medeia as his consort), Diomedes, Peleus, Alcmena, and Cadmos.⁷¹

Lyrical descriptions of life in the Isles of the Blessed can be found in two poems by Pindar, his second *Olympian Ode* and a fragment from one of his dirges, from which the following passages are worth citing:

There the breezes of Ocean blow gently around the Isles of the Blessed, and flowers of gold blaze forth, some from the shore on radiant trees while others are nourished by the waters; and with garlands of these, they [the inhabitants] entwine their hands and

crown their brows ... in meadows red with roses, the land outside their city is shaded with incense-trees and is heavy-laden with golden fruits; some take their pleasure in horses and wrestling, and some in draughts, and some in lyres, while the flower of perfect bliss blooms amongst them; and a sweet fragrance wafts forever over that lovely land as they mingle every kind of incense into the far-shining fire on the altars of the gods.⁷²

Those who were fortunate enough to be transferred to this realm would enjoy, in other words, for all time and in ideal surroundings, the kind of life that the Greeks of the leisured class would enjoy when they could, active and joyful, and perhaps even involving some physical exertion, but without the need for any disagreeable labour, 'for they trouble not the earth with the strength of their hands, nor the waters of the sea either, to gain a bare livelihood' (as Pindar states elsewhere when describing a sort of half-way house to this paradise).⁷³

Another home for the privileged dead was Leuce (the White Island), which served as a retirement home for great heroes of the Trojan War. Originally a purely mythical place like the Isles of the Blessed, it was later identified with a small island in the Black Sea near the mouth of the Istros (Danube). In the *Aithiopis*, a lost epic in the Trojan cycle, Achilles was said to have been transferred there after his death by his mother, the goddess Thetis (see p. 478); and in the subsequent tradition, Patroclos, Antilochos, and the greater and lesser Ajax are mentioned among its inhabitants, as is Helen (or Medeia) as the consort of Achilles.⁷⁴ For the story of how a Greek from lower Italy was supposed to have visited the island and met some of its ghostly inhabitants in historical times, see p. 574.

Elysion and its equivalents were located in the upper world in the original tradition because continuance of bodily life was thought to be essential to a vigorous and enjoyable existence; but when the idea developed that ordinary people might win a better fate for themselves in the afterlife by living well or receiving certain initiations, the imagery that was traditionally associated with this earthly paradise was borrowed to describe the part of the Underworld in which the virtuous dead could expect to live. In the late tradition, Elysion or Elysium could be used accordingly as a name for that special region of the Underworld, as in Vergil's *Aeneid*.⁷⁵ It hardly needs saying that the whole conception was significantly altered as a consequence.

Dead heroes and heroines who suffered cruel punishments in the world below

If some who were especially dear to the gods were transferred to an earthly paradise as an alternative to death, some who had especially offended the gods were subjected to cruel and ingenious tortures in the Underworld after their death. Here again the earliest ideas are not strictly ethical, since those who are singled out for these punishments are not the worst evil-doers, let alone the wicked in general, but simply certain persons who have excited the particular hatred of the gods. Odysseus sees three offenders suffering such treatment during his visit to the Underworld in the *Odyssey*. He first sees the gigantic **Tityos** lying stretched out on the ground,

bound fast so that he is unable to fend off two vultures, which peck at his liver, one on either side, a fate that he suffered because that he had tried to rape Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis (see p. 141).⁷⁶ Next comes **Tantalos**, a wealthy Lydian king (see p. 419), who is subjected to everlasting hunger and thirst in cruelly frustrating circumstances. For he stands in a pool of water that splashes against his chin but vanishes away leaving nothing behind whenever he tries to drink from it; and heavily-laden fruit-trees of every kind spread their boughs above his head, but they are always tossed out of his reach by a gust of wind whenever he tries to pluck their fruit.⁷⁷ Or in the *Returns*, a lost epic in the Trojan cycle, a stone was suspended above his head by Zeus in such a way that it threatened to crash down on him if he reached out towards any of the good things that were set before him.⁷⁸ This rock could easily be added to the Homeric description to form a combined picture;⁷⁹ Pindar refers to 'the rock of Tantalos' in a way that suggests that this expression had become a proverbial by his time,⁸⁰ meaning much the same as 'the sword of Damocles'. Although nothing is said in the *Odyssey* about the nature of Tantalos' crime, it is explained in the *Returns* that when he had been invited to live with the gods, and had been offered a choice of whatever he most desired, he had presumptuously asked to live exactly like the gods; so Zeus fulfilled the promise in a purely formal manner, by setting every kind of good thing in from of him but in such circumstances that he could never enjoy it. In later accounts, he was also said to have suffered this punishment for various other reasons, see further on p. 419.

The last of the three offenders in the *Odyssey* is **Sisyphos**, a former king of Corinth, who is condemned to roll a huge stone up a hill without any prospect of rest or release; for whenever he is about to reach the top of the hill, he is pushed back by the weight of the stone, and it rolls right down to the bottom.⁸¹ Once again the *Odyssey* neglects to explain his crime, but later sources report that the task was imposed on him because he had escaped back to the upper world through a deception when he had died on a first occasion, or else had simply angered Zeus by betraying a secret of his, see further on p. 553.

It must now be asked whether the punishment that was assigned to each of these offenders was intended to reflect the particular nature of his offence. That certainly seems to have been the case with Tityos, since the liver was often regarded as the seat of the desires in ancient times; and if this notion was already current in Homer's age, it could have been appreciated that Tityos was made to suffer in the part of him with which he had lusted after Leto. Tantalos for his part had been admitted to the table of the gods and had abused the privilege, and it is therefore wholly fitting that he should not merely be made to suffer hunger and thirst, but to suffer it in such a way that he is kept permanently and painfully aware of his reversal of fortune. This is clearly the moral that was supposed to be drawn from his punishment in the *Returns*, and it is reasonable to assume that Homer's audience would have interpreted it in a similar way. The significance of Sisyphos' punishment is less immediately obvious. Of the various explanations that have been suggested, the most plausible relates it to the special nature of his crime as in the preceding cases: since he suffered this penalty (in one version at least) because he had cheated death by escaping back to the upper world, a symbolic meaning might be detected in the

process by which he is perpetually checked and forced back again as he tries to make his way upwards. It would assuredly have been difficult for him to escape again if he was constantly having to roll his stone.

Comparable punishments were assigned to other villains in the post-Homeric tradition, but none became as celebrated for their sufferings as the Homeric trio, apart perhaps from **Ixion**, who attempted nothing less than to seduce the wife of Zeus. A Thessalian chieftain who belonged to the warlike Lapith people (see p. 311), Ixion had first started on the downward path by murdering his father-in-law. For when seeking to win Dia, daughter of Deioneus, as his wife, he promised to give her father many bride-gifts, but refused to hand them over after the marriage. When Deioneus seized some horses from him as security for the gifts, Ixion dug a fire-pit, filled it with burning coals, and invited his father-in-law to come and collect the gifts; and he caused him to fall into the fire-pit, or threw him into it, on his arrival. As the first man to murder a close relation, Ixion found it impossible to find anyone, man or god, who was willing to purify him, until Zeus finally took pity on him, and not only purified him but invited him to come up to share in the life of the gods. By way of gratitude, Ixion tried to seduce his benefactor's wife, and on learning of this, Zeus tested him by fashioning a cloud-image of Hera; and when Ixion demonstrated his intentions by having intercourse with the image (see also on p. 312), he was tied to a wheel and whirled through the air on it by way of a punishment (see [Figure 5.3](#)).⁸² Although he would have undergone this punishment in the upper world in the original story, it was transferred to the Underworld by Hellenistic authors, and it must be acknowledged that Ixion belongs very fittingly in the company of Tityos and Tantalos.⁸³ Although the story of his crime may have been quite ancient, there is no surviving evidence for it from any earlier than the fifth century BC.



Figure 5.3. Ixion bound on his wheel. Lucanian cup, 400–380 BC. Museum of Tübingen University, Germany.

According to an old tradition, which is attested for an early epic called the *Minyas*, **Amphion** was punished in the Underworld in some unspecified way for having mocked Leto and her children⁸⁴ (an offence ascribed to his wife Niobe alone in the usual tradition, see p. 341). **Salmoneus**, a mythical Peloponnesian ruler who tried to usurp the functions and privileges of Zeus (see p. 396), first appears in this company in the *Aeneid*;⁸⁵ and other heroes who are named among the tormented dead in Roman sources, but not in any surviving Greek source, are **Phlegyas**, who dared to attack Apollo's temple at Delphi,⁸⁶ and the **Aloadai**, who threatened to launch an assault against heaven (see p. 84).⁸⁷

The significance of these mythical punishments changes as the tradition evolves. In the Homeric account, the fate of the tormented offenders (as of the favoured few who are transferred to Elysion) is wholly exceptional, and cannot be interpreted as providing a warning for ordinary people, who could expect to share a common posthumous fate of living the same half-life as shades. When the notion arose, however, that there might be an overarching order of justice in which the ordinary dead would be judged in the other world for crimes committed in this, and the

deficiencies of human justice would thus be remedied, the sufferings of dead offenders from myth naturally acquired an exemplary significance. In Vergil's depiction of the infernal place of punishment, Phlegyas is portrayed accordingly as shouting words of warning through the gloom, calling on others to learn from his example to behave righteously and scorn no god.⁸⁸ It should be noted, furthermore, that it was not originally imagined that there was any separate place of punishment that could be described as a hell; in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus sees Tantalos, Tityos, and Sisyphos suffering their pains among the shades in the common home of the dead. In subsequent eschatological schemes, however, which involve a judgement of the dead, it came to be imagined that the deserving and undeserving dead would be consigned to different regions of the Underworld, which would be bright and blissful in the one case, and a gloomy place of misery in the other. From the time of Plato onwards, the place of punishment or correction (or the worst part of it) was quite often called Tartaros. This usage entailed a shift of meaning, as when the abode of the virtuous dead in the Underworld came to be called Elysion, since Tartaros was originally a wholly separate place that served as a prison for banished deities (see p. 18).

Developments in eschatological belief, and the idea of a universal judgement of the dead

The evolution of Underworld mythology over the centuries was inevitably much affected by developments in eschatological belief, whether in Greek society in general or in narrower circles within it. Although it would take us far out of our way to attempt to trace these developments in any detail, something must be said about the broader trends. With regard to the fate of the dead in the afterlife, two conceptions subsisted side by side in the classical period, the old one that suggested most of the dead would share a common fate, and a newer one that suggested the dead would meet with differing fates in accordance with their merits. In the ancient belief found in Homer, as outlined above, the dead would live together in the same surroundings in the nether gloom as witless or semi-witless shades. Even if a person fated to this half-life could have nothing horrific to fear, the prospect would be bleak and cheerless; Achilles declares in the *Odyssey* that he would rather be the meanest serf alive than the king of all the dead.⁸⁹ By the classical era, however, another view had also developed, in which it was supposed that the departed might be rewarded or punished in accordance with their behaviour during their earthly lives, or that people might assure themselves of a better lot in the afterlife by receiving certain initiations. In that case, a pattern of light and shade is introduced into the picture, for some must be consigned to a brighter destiny, presumably in a brighter region of the Underworld, and others to a darker destiny.

The mysteries, especially those at Eleusis, certainly exercised a considerable influence in this connection; most Athenians and many Greeks from elsewhere were initiated at Eleusis, and the rites seem to have been effective in enduing initiates with the subjective assurance that they would fare well in the afterlife. Although strictly ethical considerations remained very much in the background in Eleusinian

eschatological belief, the simple evolution of moral sentiment encouraged the idea that the good might be rewarded and the evil punished in the afterlife; for since evil is so often rewarded in this world and the good often suffer, it came to be surmised that the accounts must be balanced in the afterlife if there is, indeed, any order of justice. As we will see, such ideas were certainly current in popular belief in the classical period, and they marked an advance on the cruder idea that people's crimes might be punished in their children or descendants. Various eschatological beliefs of an unorthodox nature that developed in relatively narrow circles, Pythagorean, Orphic, and Bacchic, were also of significance in this respect from the late archaic period onwards. Although ritual factors were also involved, members of such circles usually believed that it was necessary to lead a good and pure life if one was to meet with good fortune in the afterlife.

Among Pythagoreans and others who accepted the idea of the transmigration of the soul, elaborate eschatological schemes were devised in which the soul was thought to undergo successive rebirths, living alternately in an earthly body and in the other world, and to pass to equivalents of hell, purgatory, and paradise after each earthly incarnation. These ideas found their way into high literature and general culture through the writings of such authors as Pindar and, above all, Plato. Thus, in the second *Olympian Ode* of Pindar, which has already been partially quoted above, those who have lived a just and pious life in this world will enjoy a life of ease below in a region where the sun shines forever, while wrongdoers will be subjected to punishment; the soul then returns to the upper world, and whosoever keeps his soul free from all wrong on either side of the grave for three successive cycles will pass to the paradisaal place described in the quotation (see p. 105).⁹⁰ This account reflects a pattern of belief in which man is thought to have fallen from a divine origin to enter into a cycle of reincarnation, from which he can finally escape by virtuous conduct combined with certain ritual obligations, and so hope to achieve a condition of entire and eternal happiness. Plato again owed much to Orphico-Pythagorean teachings for the imagery and pattern of his great eschatological myths, and other religious and quasi-religious beliefs added their various contributions in the later literature that touched on these matters. As the traditional Homeric ideas thus came to be interblended with later ideas of diverse origin, authors from the time of Plato onwards came to offer curiously heterogeneous descriptions of the afterlife, accompanied by increasingly elaborate and definite accounts of the topography of Hades.

As has already been mentioned, Pindar and Aeschylus are the first authors to make any definite reference to a judgement of the dead (see p. 104), and it was generally agreed thereafter that the judgement was performed not by Hades himself, but by dead mortals who had been exceptionally just during their earthly lives. The three mythical heroes who were most often credited with this honour were **Minos**, **Rhadamanthys**, and **Aiacos**. Plato (died 347 BC) is the first author to identify them as such,⁹¹ but it can be inferred from the way in which he speaks of them that he was following an earlier tradition, probably derived from the mythology associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries. In heroic mythology, Minos and Rhadamanthys were two early members of the Cretan royal family who were celebrated for their justice

and their wisdom as lawmakers (see pp. 289 and 301), while Aiacos was a primordial king of Aegina who was a paragon of righteousness and was often invited accordingly to arbitrate in disputes (see p. 426). Plato adds the Eleusinian hero Triptolemos (see p. 112) to the list in his *Apology*, along with ‘other demigods who have lived just lives’,⁹² but Triptolemos is rarely mentioned again in this role. Some authors assign separate functions to the different judges according to their fancy; Plato thus suggests in the *Gorgias*, for instance, that Rhadamanthys judges the Asiatic dead, and Aiacos the Europeans, while Minos has the last word if their judgement should need revision; or in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Minos presides over a sort of appeal court that decides the fate of those who have been condemned to death on false charges, while Rhadamanthys judges and punishes wrongdoers in a gloomier region of the Underworld.⁹³ Aiacos was sometimes said to have been appointed to duties of another kind as the door-keeper of Hades (or keeper of the keys, which comes to much the same thing);⁹⁴ and some authors continued to follow Homer in believing that Rhadamanthys spent his posthumous life in Elysion or the Isles of the Blessed (see p. 302).⁹⁵

The dead are consigned by these judges to a better or worse region of the Underworld in accordance with their deserts, and so to a better or worse fate in the afterlife. Broadly speaking, the abode and manner of life of the favoured dead are pictured in terms of the imagery that was traditionally associated with Elysion, or the Isles of the Blessed, while the unrighteous dead are condemned to the dismal half-life that was the common lot of the dead in the Homeric account, and perhaps to hard labour also, and some form of correction or punishment. If due exception is made for the cruel fates that were traditionally assigned to a few notable figures from myth, Greek accounts of the punishment of the dead are very restrained by comparison that those that were once current in the Christian tradition. There is little direct reference to the infliction of physical torment, up until the Roman period at least. Such punishments as are recorded in connection with Eleusis are of a symbolic nature; the impure will lie in mud, the uninitiated will strive in vain to carry purifying water in leaky vessels (see p. 111). The picture darkens, however, as the Hellenistic period advances. In vase-paintings from lower Italy, the Erinyes (Furies), or the Poinai (Avengers), who are much the same, can be seen inflicting punishment on the dead with scourges or flaming torches; and the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochos* (probably first century BC) remarks that the wicked will pay for their sins everlastingly in Tartaros where they are ‘licked by beasts, constantly burned by the torches of the Poinai, and subjected to all manner of torment’.⁹⁶ In literature from the Roman period, mythical monsters are sometimes presented as agents of retribution; in Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Dead*, for instance, the dead Minos sees a temple-robber being torn apart by the Chimaira.⁹⁷

That is not to say that popular fears about cruel punishments in the Underworld are unattested in the earlier literature. On the contrary, there is good reason to suppose that such apprehensions were fairly widespread in classical times. In Plato’s *Republic*, for instance, the aged merchant Cephalos remarks to Socrates that many old people like himself feel disquiet in the face of death, for they begin to worry that the stories told of the world below, and of punishments that are inflicted there for

wrongs committed here, may in fact be true.⁹⁸ One of the sayings of Democritus points in the same direction: 'Some people, who know nothing of the dissolution of mortal nature but are well acquainted with evil-doing in life, afflict the period of their life with worries and fears by inventing false tales about the period that will follow the end of their life'.⁹⁹ Pausanias' description of Polygnotos' painting of the Underworld gives an idea of how punishments for very grave offences would have been imagined by such people; in one scene, a man who had been wicked to his father was shown as being strangled by him when he arrived among the dead, and in another, a temple-robber received punishment from a woman, perhaps an Erinyes (Fury), who (so Pausanias tells us) knew all about drugs and especially those that cause suffering to men.¹⁰⁰ Popular fears about the beasts, bogies and daimones of the Underworld also find little reflection in high literature. We would know nothing, for instance, about the repulsive Eurynomos if Pausanias had not referred to him in connection with Polygnotos' painting; this daimon of the Underworld, who devoured the flesh of the dead leaving only their bones behind, was blue-black in colour like a carrion-fly, had grinning teeth, and used a vulture's hide as his seat.¹⁰¹ In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, which is a rich source for lore of the Underworld, Dionysos and his slave Xanthias fear that they will meet horrible monsters after rowing across into Hades, and are alarmed to encounter Empousa, a female bogey with a luminous face and a copper leg.¹⁰²

As already mentioned, the posthumous punishments recorded in connection with the Eleusinian Mysteries are symbolic in nature; the impure will lie in mud, the uninitiated will perform futile tasks that point to the implications of their negligence. In describing Polygnotos' painting of the Underworld, Pausanias mentions that it showed two women carrying water in broken pots, and says that they were identified by an inscription as women who had failed to have themselves initiated into the mysteries.¹⁰³ Vase-paintings from the end of the sixth century that show little winged figures struggling to fill a leaky urn presumably carry the same meaning. The imagery is not hard to interpret if it is remembered that prospective initiates would have to take a purificatory bath before their initiation; such an initiation would have assured these women and others like them of a better lot in the afterlife, but it is now too late for them to receive it, however great their wish. According to a late tradition, first attested at the end of the Hellenistic period, the same futile task is imposed on the **Danaids**, princesses from Argive legend who had murdered their husbands (see p. 217).¹⁰⁴ If they must constantly attempt to fetch water in leaky pitchers during their posthumous existence, or to fill a large water-jar as the water constantly runs out through a hole in the bottom, this symbolizes their unavailing effort to procure water to purify themselves from their blood-guilt. A certain **Ocnos**, who also appears in Polygnotos' painting, performs the rather different task of constantly plaiting a rope as it is constantly devoured by a donkey, which stands behind him (or beside him). Since his name means 'hesitation' or 'vacillation', his posthumous activity should doubtless be interpreted in the same way as that of the anonymous water-carriers, as illustrating the predicament of those who have deferred their initiation until it is too late. It came to be suggested, however, that this merely illustrated Ocnos' fate during his lifetime as a hardworking man who had

an extravagant wife who spent all his earnings as quickly as he brought them in.¹⁰⁵

Vergil's account of Aeneas' journey into the Underworld

Having begun with Homer's account of the Underworld, we may conclude with an epic account from the Roman period, which reflects intervening developments, namely that offered by Vergil in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*; for in describing how Aeneas passes through the different regions of the Underworld in the company of the Cumaean Sibyl, Vergil provides the clearest and most elaborate and consistent account to be found in any classical writer after Plato. To gain entry into the Underworld, Aeneas plucks a golden bough on the advice of the Sibyl from a special tree in a grove near Cumae, and brings it with him as an offering for Proserpina (Persephone); it is suggested in later sources that he took the bough from Diana's grove at Aricia, plucking it from the famous tree that was guarded by the 'king' of the grove.¹⁰⁶ After making their way below through a cave near Lake Avernus, Aeneas and the Sibyl encounter two alarming groups of beings at the threshold of Hades, the first consisting of personifications of all that is most terrible in life (such as Fear, Hunger, Death, War, and others who are described as members of the family of Night in Hesiod's *Theogony*), and the second consisting of traditional monsters of hybrid form such as the Hydra and Chimaira, and the Centaurs, Harpies and Gorgons, or at least the shades of them. Temporary inhabitants of that region are the shades of the unburied dead, who have to remain on the near side of the infernal river for a hundred years until they can be ferried across to the world of the dead.¹⁰⁷

After making their passage across the boundary-river (here the Styx) in Charon's boat, Aeneas and his companion are confronted by the three-headed Cerberos, but the Sibyl soon puts him to sleep by tossing him a drugged honey-cake. They then follow a path that runs through the various regions or zones that harbour those of the dead who are neither in Elysion nor in Tartaros. All are people who have died before their proper time for one reason or another. First, at the very entranceway, the souls of dead infants can be heard bewailing their fate; in the second zone come those who have been condemned to death on false charges, but are now receiving true justice at a court convened by Minos; in the third zone come those who have died by their own hand (even though they would now be willing to endure any suffering under the light of the day, if only it were possible for them to find their way back again across the encircling coils of Styx); the fourth zone is formed by the Fields of Mourning (*Campi Lugentes*), the sorrowful home of those who have pined away for love or perished through its consequences; and finally, in the innermost zone, come warriors who have died a glorious death in battle. Aeneas and his companion now arrive at a place where the road divides, leading to Tartaros on one side, and Elysion on the other.¹⁰⁸

Aeneas and the Sibyl skirt the borders of Tartaros, which is separated from them by rings of battlements and by Pyriphlegethon, the flaming river of hell. The groans of the damned can be heard through the gates of Tartaros, and Tisiphone, the guardian of the gate, can be seen sitting in an iron tower beside the gates, clad in a bloodied robe. The Sibyl explains that Tisiphone, with some help from her sister-

Furies, whips the most wicked of the dead through the gates with her scourge after Rhadamanthys has passed sentence on them; and she then tells Aeneas of the sufferings that are imposed in Tartaros on various mythical heroes such as Tantalos, Ixion, and Phlegyas (see pp. 106ff), and also on the Titans (who are now to be found in the same place since Tartaros has come to be regarded as a part of the Underworld). Vergil summarizes that character of the inmates of Tartaros most succinctly in the words *ausi omnes immane nefas ausoque potiti* – ‘all had dared a monstrous and unspeakable deed, and had accomplished that which they had dared’.¹⁰⁹ He specifies violation of the closest ties of blood-relationship and social obligation, treason against one’s native land, gross abuse of power, and direct offences against the gods.¹¹⁰ With this account, few in antiquity would have disagreed. At the end of their journey, Aeneas and the Sibyl arrive at Elysion, the bright and happy home of the righteous dead. Here Vergil places, among others, great and successful patriots, renowned warriors, priests, and poets of more than common inspiration.¹¹¹ At this point we can take our leave of Aeneas, before he is accorded his preview of the future history of Rome (see p. 530).

Other myths of Demeter

How Demeter sent Triptolemos out from Eleusis to spread her gift of grain; her associate Iacchos

The other myths of Demeter that are not connected with the abduction of Persephone still remain to be considered. According to a tradition that originated in Attica, she charged a young Eleusinian called TRIPTOLEMOS to spread her gift of grain through the world, a figure who is first mentioned in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as one of the Eleusinian princes who received instruction from the goddess in her rites and mysteries.¹¹² Although many different accounts are offered of his birth, he is perhaps most frequently described as a son of the king who was reigning at Eleusis at the time of Demeter’s visit (whether that king is named as Celeos, Eleusis, or Eleusinos), and he is sometimes identified with the nursling who was tended by Demeter. Or else he was a son of Oceanos, or of a certain Raros, whose meadow outside Eleusis was the first site to have been sown or harvested, or of Dysaules, another local hero with agricultural connections.¹¹³

Although his mission was probably restricted to Attica in the earliest tradition, the Athenians took up his story with enthusiasm as their city grew in power, and came to present him as spreading the goddess’s gift far beyond their own territory. He is thus depicted very frequently on Attic vases, which typically show him as he might be imagined when setting off on his journey, seated in a two-wheeled chariot, which is apparently self-propelled and may be winged, and holding ears of corn in his hands. In literary accounts, however, his chariot is drawn by winged dragons, which are involved in two of the stories in which people try to interfere with his mission.

So he set off through the air to sow the Greek world, or whole inhabited world, with grain, and to spread knowledge of its cultivation. Although Sophocles offered

an account of his adventures in a lost play, the *Triptolemos*, we now have to rely on sources from the Roman period for any account of his adventures. Three specific tales are recorded in connection with his journey. When he arrived in Scythia, a local ruler called LYN COS tried to murder him in his sleep because he wanted to usurp the honour of spreading the gift of grain; but as he was about to thrust his sword into the stranger's chest, Demeter foiled his plan by transforming him into a lynx.¹¹⁴ In that same region, CHARNABON, king of the Getai, offered a friendly welcome to Triptolemos, but set out likewise to plot his destruction, and arranged for one of his dragons to be killed to prevent him from escaping. On this occasion too, however, Demeter came to the rescue of her favourite, and returned the chariot to him with a new dragon attached to it to replace the one that had been killed. As for Charnabon, she punished him with death and placed an image of him in the sky as the constellation Ophiouchos (the Serpent-holder), in which he can be seen grasping a dragon as though he is just about to be killed by it.¹¹⁵ And finally, at Patrai in Achaia, the ruler's son ANT HEAS yoked the dragon-chariot while Triptolemos was asleep and tried to sow some grain from it; but he was unable to control it (much as in the legend of Phaethon) and plunged to his death. Together with Eumelos, the father of the dead youth, Triptolemos founded the Achaean city of Antheia in his memory.¹¹⁶

IACCHOS was a minor god who was associated with Demeter and Persephone, primarily in connection with the Eleusinian Mysteries. Of some importance in cult, but almost none in mythology, he seems to have originated as the personification of a refrain in much the same way as Hymenaios (see p. 206, cf. Linos on p. 239), in this case of the ritual cry of *Iacch' o Iacche*, which was chanted by the initiates as they passed in procession from Athens to Eleusis. Although he was often equated with Dionysos, apparently for no better reason than that his name sounds like that of Bakchos, he was also described as a son (or even the husband) of Demeter, or as a son of Persephone or of Dionysos.¹¹⁷ He presided over the great procession of the initiates as they marched along the Sacred Way to Eleusis; his image was drawn in front of them on a cart and was accompanied by his priest, the Iacchagogos. The chorus of initiates in Aristophanes' *Frogs* appeals to Iacchos to shine on them as their leader.¹¹⁸ He is connected with one notable miracle recounted by Herodotus. Just before the battle of Salamis, certain Greek allies of the invading Persians saw a supernatural cloud of dust (for there was no one left in Attica to make one) moving from Eleusis, and heard the Iacchos-hymn of the mysteries rising up from it; and as it moved towards the Greek camp at Salamis, the eye-witnesses knew that disaster was imminent for the Persian fleet.¹¹⁹

Demeter's love for Iasion, and their son Ploutos; other children attributed to her

Demeter could hardly be described as an amorous goddess. The *Iliad* mentions that she aroused the love of Zeus without naming any offspring,¹²⁰ while the *Odyssey* tells how she once engaged in a love affair with a mortal, yielding to her passion for IASION and lying with him in a thrice-ploughed field.¹²¹ Homer cites the latter story

along with some others to show how the gods resented love affairs between goddesses and mortals, and he reports accordingly that Zeus struck Iasion with a thunderbolt after learning of the matter. The *Theogony* also mentions the affair, adding that the field was located in Crete, and that the fruit of the union was a child called PLOUTOS (Wealth).¹²² As his name might indicate, he symbolized the wealth yielded by the ground in the harvest. It has long been recognized that the story of the mating on the ploughfield is a mythical reflection of a common fertility rite in which couples would have intercourse on the fields to encourage the growth of the crops.

In later accounts, Iasion was sometimes said to have attempted to rape Demeter, and to have been struck by a thunderbolt for that reason; or in a partially rationalized version, he suffered that fate because he violated a cultic image of the goddess.¹²³ There was disagreement about his place of origin. If the *Theogony* implies that he was a Cretan (and he is described correspondingly as a grandson of Minos in some late sources),¹²⁴ some authorities, including Hellanicus, say that Electra, daughter of Atlas, bore him to Zeus on the island of Samothrace (see p. 441).¹²⁵ In this latter connection, he was also known as Eetion.¹²⁶ A late tale recorded in the astronomical literature recounts that Demeter bore two sons to Iasion in Crete, named Ploutos and Philomelos and that the two of them subsequently quarrelled because Ploutos, who was the richer as his name would suggest, refused to share any of his wealth with his brother. So under force of necessity, Philomelos bought two oxen and invented the plough to scratch a living from the land; and his divine mother was so impressed by his ingenuity that she placed him in the heavens as the constellation Boötes (the Oxherd). This is a little fable of a kind familiar in folklore in which there are rich and poor sons, and the poor son comes out best in the end after being scorned by his brother.¹²⁷ For the curious local legend, in which Demeter was said to have borne the wonder-horse Areion, and perhaps a daughter too to Poseidon, after the two had mated together in horse-form, see p. 127. Otherwise she was sometimes said to have borne the goddess Hecate to Zeus.¹²⁸

How Demeter punished Erysichthon for desecrating her sacred grove

Demeter has one more notable myth, in this case a revenge-story, which tells how she punished an act of impiety that was committed against her in Thessaly. For when ERISYCHTHON, son of Triopas or Myrmidon, wanted wood to build a new hall or palace, he was foolish enough to think that it would be a good idea to cut down her sacred grove to procure the necessary timber, and she punished him by afflicting him with perpetual hunger. In the first full account of the story by Callimachus, he set out to perform the task with twenty attendants, whom he had provided with axes and hatchets, and when the goddess herself tried to warn him off in the guise of her priestess Nicippe, he merely threatened to strike her with his axe if she failed to move out of his way. Angered beyond telling by his behaviour, Demeter resumed her true appearance as a goddess, and told him to continue with the work because he would soon have real need of a banqueting-hall. She then afflicted him with a ravenous and insatiable hunger. The more he ate, the hungrier he grew and the

thinner he became. He ate continuously throughout the day, consuming all his livestock, and his mules and horses, and even the cat, until nothing at all was left, and he was reduced to begging at the crossroads.¹²⁹ It is stated in later accounts that he acquired money for food by repeatedly selling his daughter MESTRA into slavery; for her lover Poseidon had granted her the power to transform herself at will, and she was thus able to escape on each occasion by turning into an animal of some kind or another.¹³⁰ Although Mestra's assistance is first indicated in Hellenistic sources, the legend of Erysichthon seems to have been fairly ancient because a fragment from the Hesiodic *Catalogue* mentions that he was called Aithon on account of his burning (*aithon*) hunger.¹³¹

In Ovid's account, Erysichthon cut down the largest and oldest oak in the grove, among others, persisting even when blood poured out of severed bark, and the tree-nymph who lived in it spoke out with her dying breath to warn him that he would soon be punished for his deeds. The poet was doubtless inspired here by a passage in Callimachus' account, in which he began by cutting down an exceptionally large poplar tree, causing it to utter a cry that alerted Demeter to the sacrilege. All the Dryads of the grove approached Demeter dressed in black mourning-robcs to beg her to inflict due punishment on Erysichthon. The goddess did so in the usual fashion, and he finally sold his daughter to raise money for food. She prayed to Poseidon to come to her aid, and he transformed her into a fisherman to enable her to escape. On seeing what had happened, her father sold her repeatedly to different masters, and she escaped in animal form each time, now as a bird, now as a cow, now as a deer. But even then, he was unable to acquire enough food to satisfy his hunger, and he finally tore his limbs apart with his teeth to consume his own body.¹³²

According to an alternative tradition, the fateful sacrilege was committed by a Thessalian king called TRIOPAS, who was sometimes described as Erysichthon's father or brother. Since he was regarded as the founder of Cnidos in the south-west corner of Asia Minor, his destruction of the grove was used to explain why he had to leave his native Thessaly, as a result of the anger that his actions provoked among the local people.¹³³ Or in a version from the astronomical literature, he incurred the anger of Demeter by pulling down her temple (*sic*, probably an error) to acquire material for the roof of his palace, and she initially afflicted him with insatiable hunger as in the case of Erysichthon, but also added to his sufferings towards the end by sending a huge dragon against him; and on his death, he was placed among the stars at her will as the constellation Ophiouchos (the Serpent-holder), with a dragon coiled around him inflicting punishment on him for all eternity.¹³⁴

Notes

1 Hes. *Theog.* 456, Hom. *Il.* 9.158.

2 E.g. Pl. *Gorg.* 493b, *Crat.* 403a.

3 See e.g. the testament of Theophrastos in Diogenes Laertius 5.51.

4 Paus. 6.25.2.

5 Str. 8.344, Paus. 2.35.5 (Clymenos).

6 Seneca *Herc. Fur.* 724–5.

7 Hom. *Il.* 5.395–8; he went up to Olympos to be healed by Paian in any case, *ibid.* 399–402.

- 8 Serv. *Ecl.* 7.61.
- 9 Hom. *Il.* 9.454–7.
- 10 Hom. *Hymn. Demeter* 1–94.
- 11 Baubo, Clem. Alex. *Protrep.* 2.20.
- 12 Hom. *Hymn. Demeter* 93–300.
- 13 Hom. *Hymn. Demeter* 401.
- 14 Half the year in each realm, e.g. Ov. *Met.* 5.564–7, Hyg. *Fab.* 146.
- 15 Hom. *Hymn. Demeter* 301–489. For the myth as a whole, see also Apollod. 1.5.1–3, D.S. 5.4–5, Ov. *Met.* 5.345–571, Fasti 4.417–620.
- 16 Ov. *Met.* 5.538–50.
- 17 Apollod. 1.5.3, 2.5.12.
- 18 Ant. Lib. 24, Ov. *Met.* 5.446–61, cf. Nic. *Ther.* 486ff.
- 19 Hom. *Hymn. Demeter* 207–11.
- 20 Trampled by Demeter, Oppian *On Hunting* 3.486ff; transformed by Persephone, Str. 8.3.14, Ov. *Met.* 10.728–30, Photius s.v. Mintha.
- 21 Schol. Hes. *Theog.* 913, Paus. 1.38.5.
- 22 Conon 15.
- 23 Paus. 2.36.7.
- 24 Paus. 1.14.2.
- 25 E.g. D.S. 5.4.2.
- 26 Ov. *Met.* 5.409–37
- 27 Cicero *Against Varro* 2.4.106; Persephone abducted near Henna, Ov. *Met.* 5.385ff, D.S. 5.3.2–3.
- 28 Hom. *Od.* 11. 46–7, 225–7, 385–6, 633–5.
- 29 Ibid. 10.491–5.
- 30 E.g. Theognis 702–4, D.S. 4.26.1, Moschus 3.123–4 respectively.
- 31 Hom. *Od.* 11.9ff.
- 32 Ibid. 24.1–14.
- 33 Hom. *Il.* 23.99–101, 16.855–7, 22.361–3.
- 34 Hom. *Od.* 10.501–15, 11.13–22.
- 35 Ibid. 11.23ff.
- 36 Hom. *Od.* 11.508–40, 572–5.
- 37 Hom. *Il.* 23.71–4 (unnamed boundary-river), 8.369 (Styx), cf. Verg. *Aen.* 6.384ff; Acheron first as boundary-river in Alcaeus 38, cf. Sappho 95 (implied), Aesch. *Seven* 854–60, Paus. 10.28.1, etc.
- 38 Hom. *Od.* 10.513–4.
- 39 E.g. Pl. *Rep.* 10.621c, Verg. *Aen.* 6.714–15.
- 40 E.g. Eur. *Alc.* 443.
- 41 Hes. *Theog.* 783–92.
- 42 Hdt. 6.74.
- 43 Paus. 8.18.4–6.
- 44 Thesprotian Acheron, Hdt. 5.92, Paus. 1.17.5 (also mentions the Thesprotian Cocytos), 9.30.3 (oracle of dead by it at Aornos), Plut. *Cimon* 6 (at Acheron near Heracleia); Acheron in Elis, Str. 8.344.
- 45 Theogn. 705–6, Arist. *Frogs* 186.
- 46 Pl. *Rep.* 621a.
- 47 Ed. G. Pugliese Carratelli, *Parola del Passato*, 154–5, 1974, pp. 10–1; English translation in W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge, Mass., 1985, p. 293.
- 48 Paus. 9.39.4.
- 49 Gates of Hades, Hom. *Il.* 5.644–6, cf. 23.71, Hes. *Theog.* 773; Hades as warder of gates, Hom. *Il.* 8.367, 13.415.
- 50 E.g. Hom. *Il.* 22.52, *Od.* 24.204.
- 51 Hes. *Theog.* 767–73.
- 52 Hom. *Od.* 24.11–4.
- 53 Aesch. *Libation-Bearers* 622, cf. Soph. *Ajax* 831–4, Eur. *Alc.* 743–4.
- 54 Hom. *Il.* 23.100.
- 55 Ibid. 22.362–3, *Od.* 11.222.
- 56 Hom. *Il.* 23.71–4.
- 57 Hom. *Od.* 11.51–80.
- 58 *Minyas* fr. 1 Davies (from Paus. 10.28.1).
- 59 Eur. *Alc.* 252–5, 361, 439–44.

- 60 *Hom. Hymn. Demeter* 334ff.
- 61 And perhaps Athena too if she actually accompanied Heracles when she helped him to fetch Cerberos, *Hom. Od.* 11.623–6.
- 62 Verg. *Aen.* 6.295–338, c.f. *Arist. Frogs* 180–270, *Lucian D.M.* 4, 10, 22.
- 63 *Arist. Frogs* 139–40.
- 64 *Serv. Aen.* 6.392.
- 65 As witless, e.g. *Hom. Od.* 10.492–5, 11.476; examples of spontaneous action, *Il.* 23.72–3, *Od.* 11.36–50.
- 66 *Aesch. Suppl.* 231, *Pi. Ol.* 2.59.
- 67 *Hom. Od.* 11.568–71.
- 68 *Hom. Il.* 19.259–60, cf. 3.278–9.
- 69 *Hom. Od.* 4.561–9 (564–8 quoted).
- 70 *Pi. Ol.* 2.75–7, cf. *Hes. W.D.* 169ad.
- 71 *Pi. Ol.* 2.78–9 (Peleus, Kadmos, Achilles), *Ibycus* 291 (Achilles and Medeia), 294 (Diomedes), *Eur. Bacch.* 1338–9 (Cadmos and Harmonia), *Ant. Lib.* 33 (Alcmene).
- 72 *Pi. Ol.* 2.70–4, fr. 129 SM.
- 73 *Ibid.* 2.63–5.
- 74 Achilles on Leuce, Proclus on Aethiopsis, *Pi. Nem.* 4.49, *Eur. Iph. Taur.* 436–8, *Apollod. Epit.* 5.5; Leonymos (see p. 583) sees heroes of the Trojan War on island, *Paus.* 3.19.12; further lore in *Philostr. Her.* 20.32–40.
- 75 Verg. *Aen.* 6.542, 744.
- 76 *Hom. Od.* 11.575–81, cf. *Apollod.* 1.4.1, Verg. *Aen.* 6.595–600.
- 77 *Hom. Od.* 11. 582–92, cf. *Apollod. Epit.* 1.24.
- 78 *Returns* fr. 9 Davies (from *Athen.* 281b); cf. *Alcman* 79, *Pi. Ol.* 1.55–8, *Pher.* 3F38.
- 79 *Paus.* 10.31.2 (in Polygnotos' painting), *Apollod. Epit.* 2.1, *Hyg. Fab.* 82.
- 80 *Pi. Isth.* 8.9–10, cf. *Archilochus* 91W.
- 81 *Hom. Od.* 11.593–600.
- 82 *D.S.* 4.69.3–4, schol. *A.R.* 3.62, schol. *Pi. Pyth.* 2.40b; early allusions, *Aesch. Eum.* 718 (committed first murder), *Pi. Pyth.* 2.31–2 (similar).
- 83 *Pi. Pyth.* 2.21–48. *D.S.* 4.69.4–5, *Apollod. Epit.* 1.20, *Lucian D.D.* 6; *Hyg. Fab.* 62 (bound to wheel by Hermes), schol. *Eur. Phoen.* 1185 (fiery wheel); suffers punishment in Underworld, *A.R.* 3.61–3, Verg. *Georg.* 3.37–9, Verg. *Aen.* 6.601.
- 84 *Minyas* fr. 4 Davies (from *Paus.* 9.5.4).
- 85 Verg. *Aen.* 6.585–6.
- 86 *Ibid.* 6.618–20, *Val. Flacc.* 2.192–4.
- 87 Verg. *Aen.* 6.582.
- 88 *Pl. Gorg.* 523be, cf. *Eur. Orest.* 265, *ps.Pl. Axiochos* 371e, Verg. *Aen.* 6.577ff.
- 89 *Hom. Od.* 11.489–91.
- 90 *Pi. Ol.* 2.56ff.
- 91 *Pl. Apol.* 41a, *Gorg.* 523e–524a.
- 92 *Pl. Apol.* 41a.
- 93 *Pl. Gorg.* 524a, Verg. *Aen.* 6.430–3, 564–9.
- 94 *Arist. Frogs* 465ff, *Apollod.* 3.12.6, *Lucian D.M.* 20.1.
- 95 *Hom. Od.* 4.563–4, *Pi. Ol.* 2.75.
- 96 *Ps.Pl. Axiochos* 372a.
- 97 *Lucian D.M.* 30.1.
- 98 *Pl. Rep.* 330de.
- 99 *Democritus* 68B297 DK, cf. *ibid.* 199.
- 100 *Paus.* 10.28.4.
- 101 *Ibid.*
- 102 *Arist. Frogs* 288–96.
- 103 *Paus.* 10.31.
- 104 *Ps.Pl. Axiochos* 371e.
- 105 *Paus.* 10.29.2, *Cratinus* fr. 348 Kock, *D.S.* 1.97.2, *Plut. Moralia* 473c.
- 106 Verg. *Aen.* 6.133–48 with *Servius* schol.
- 107 *Ibid.* 264–382.
- 108 *Ibid.* 383–547.
- 109 *Ibid.* 624.
- 110 *Ibid.* 548–627.
- 111 *Ibid.* 628–78.

- 112 *Hom. Hymn. Demeter* 153, 474.
- 113 For alternatives, see e.g. Paus. 1.14.2, Apollod. 1.5.2, Serv. *Georg.* 1.19, 1.163; identified with child nursed by Demeter, Ov. *Fast.* 4.507ff, Hyg. *Fab.* 147; for Rarian Meadow, see Paus. 1.38.6.
- 114 Ov. *Met.* 5.648–61.
- 115 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.14.
- 116 Paus. 7.18.2.
- 117 D.S. 3.64.1, schol. Arist., vol. 3 p.648 Dindorf, Suidas s.v Iacchos.
- 118 Arist. *Frogs* 324ff, 397ff.
- 119 Hdt. 8.65.
- 120 Hom. *Il.* 14.326.
- 121 Hom. *Od.* 5.125–8.
- 122 Hes. *Theog.* 969–74.
- 123 Tried to rape her, Apollod. 3.12.1, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.61.4; desecration of cultic image, Hellanic. 4F23, Conon 21.
- 124 Hes. *Theog.* 971, cf. D.S. 5.77.1.
- 125 Hellanic. 4F23, Apollod. 3.12.1, D.S. 5.48.2 (eccentric account of Iasion's legend in 5.48–9), Ov. *Am.* 3.10.25; son of Catreus, son of Minos, schol. *Od.* 5.25, cf. schol. Theoc 3.50.
- 126 Hellanic 4F23, Hes. fr. 177.8–12.
- 127 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.4.
- 128 Schol. A.R. 3.467.
- 129 Call. *Hymn* 6.22–115.
- 130 Lyc. 1391–6 with scholia.
- 131 Hes. fr. 34a.2–7.
- 132 Ov. *Met.* 8.738–878.
- 133 D.S. 5.61.2–3.
- 134 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.14.

6

Hera, Hestia, and Poseidon

Three Olympian deities of the first generation still remain to be considered. Most of the more important myths of **Hera**, the goddess of marriage, are related in one way or another to her own marriage to Zeus. The least conspicuous member of the family, **Hestia**, was the virgin goddess of the hearth and thus had little occasion to make any appearance whatever in myth, although she was highly honoured in her way in cult. Poseidon was allotted his own special realm, as were his two brothers, and so became the great god of the sea, but his activities were by no means limited to the sea, and he presided more generally over violent forces of nature, especially as lord of the earthquake.

Hera, the wife of Zeus, and goddess of marriage

As we have already seen, HERA became the consort of her brother Zeus, and bore him three children of no very exceptional stature, Ares, Hebe and Eileithuia, and perhaps Hephaistos too as a further child of the marriage, unless she brought him to birth without prior intercourse with her husband (see p. 70). Although the cult of Hera was largely unconnected with that of Zeus, her legends are mainly concerned with her marriage to him and all that followed from it, for better or for worse, and she came to be viewed above all as the goddess of marriage and of married women. It was inevitable that a goddess rather than a god should have been assigned to be the divine guardian of that important institution, and none could have been more suitable for the role than the wife of Zeus himself. The greatest centres of Hera's cult were the ancient Heraion between Argos and Mycenae and her splendid temple on the island of Samos. Her connection with the Argolid was particularly close, as is acknowledged in Greek literature from the earliest times; Homer and Hesiod refer to her as Argive Hera (Hera Argeie) and Pindar praises Argos as the home of Hera.¹ It seems that she originated as the great goddess of Argos and that her association with Zeus is secondary. Her cult spread far and wide, however, flourishing in the Peloponnese and the Aegean islands in particular, and latterly the Greek colonies of the Italian west. Although her name may simply mean Lady or Mistress (as a feminine form of the word *herōs*), other etymologies have also been proposed.

Hera was pictured as a mature and even matronly woman whose noble and severe beauty was very different from that of Aphrodite. In art, she is shown as a tall

and stately figure, usually fully draped, crowned with a sort of diadem (*polos*, sometimes with accompanying veil) or wearing a wreath, and carrying a sceptre. Homer refers to her as 'cow-eyed' (*boōpis*), an epithet that doubtless reflects her special connection with cattle in her native Argos; herds of cows were kept at the Argive Heraion, many votive images of cows have been discovered there, and it is known that Argive Hera particularly appreciated sacrifices of white cows. Her status as a marriage-goddess is indicated in many of her cultic titles. As the goddess who presides over the solemnization (*telos*) of marriage, she was widely honoured as Hera Teleia; and she could also be invoked as Zygia or Syzygia (she who unites in marriage), Gamostoles (she who prepares the wedding), and Gamelia (she who presides over marriage). Since the bride approaches legitimate marriage as a virgin, Hera can also be addressed and honoured as such, whether as Pais (the Girl) or Parthenos (the Maiden, as in her cult at Hermione, see below) or Nymphe (the Bride). According to a local tradition in the Argolid, she bathed in the spring of Canathos near Nauplion every year to renew her virginity² (an idea that was probably suggested by a rite in which her cultic image was bathed in the spring). At Stymphalos in Arcadia, she was indeed worshipped at three separate temples as Girl, Wife, and Widow (*Pais*, *Teleia*, *Chērē*). Local legend explained the origin of the sanctuaries by saying that Temenos, son of Pelasgos, an early hero of the city, had reared the goddess and had erected three successive temples to her under these titles, the first when she was still a young virgin, the second at the time of her marriage to Zeus, and the third when she came back to Stymphalos for a while because she had quarrelled with her husband.³ It hardly needs saying that the real explanation of these epithets lies in the fact that Hera represented women at every stage of the normal course of their life, and was worshipped by all women accordingly, whatever their present status.

As a goddess of married women, she would bring help to women in childbirth; she was honoured as Hera Eileithuia at Argos and Athens, and is presented in myth as taking direct action to ease the birth of Eurystheus (see p. 237). It is thus understandable that Eileithuia, the goddess of child-birth, a very ancient deity who can be traced back to the Mycenaean period, should have come to be classed as her daughter. Such emphasis was laid on Hera's function as a wife and patroness of married women that she was hardly conceived at all as a mother. She was never invoked or portrayed as such, and she had no very close or ancient connection with the children who came to be ascribed to her. Hera was not at all kind to her malformed son Hephaistos; for her unmotherly treatment of him, and his ingenious act of revenge, see p. 177.

Local myths and cultic traditions relating to Hera's marriage or first union with Zeus

The most distinctive myths of Hera fall into two groups, those that tell how she was supposed to have married Zeus or have first been seduced by him in various parts of the Greek world, and those of a more negative nature that tell how she persecuted mistresses and illegitimate children of Zeus. Since the tales in the latter category

relate to heroic mythology for the most part, those in the first group will be our main concern in the present chapter.

As might be expected, competing legends were offered in different parts of the Greek world about the location of Hera's wedding to Zeus or of her first intercourse with him, and such traditions were often reflected in local cult. According to a Cretan legend, for instance, Zeus married Hera on that island with due ceremony in the territory of the Cnossians, and Diodorus tells us that in his own day a temple stood at the very spot, where the local people would offer annual sacrifices 'and imitate the wedding-ceremony, just as tradition presents it as having been originally performed'.⁴ Whether these rites went beyond the outward ceremonial of the marriage to end with a ritual re-enactment of the sacred union (*hieros gamos*, hierogamy) is impossible to say; although such rites are well attested for the ancient Near East, the Greek evidence is far less definite. The myth of Demeter recounted above in which she had intercourse with Iasion on a plough field (usually in Crete, see p. 114) certainly seems to point to a rite in which intercourse was performed to encourage the fertility of the crops. The whole of nature is brought into play in the famous scene in the *Iliad* in which Zeus encloses Hera in a cloud to make love with her on Mt Ida:

then the son of Cronos clasped his wife in his arms, and beneath them the holy earth caused fresh-grown grass to spring forth, and dewy clover and meadow-saffron, and hyacinth thick and soft, that raised them off the ground; there the two of them lay down together, and were covered all around with a beautiful golden cloud, from which there fell glistening drops of dew.⁵

The island of Samos was second only to Argos as one of the most important centres of Hera's cult, and local tradition claimed that she had been born there, under a willow (*lygos*) that could still be seen in her temple in historical times. One of the main rites of her festival of the Tonaia on the island seems to have referred to her wedding to Zeus (even if that did not necessarily exhaust the meaning of the ritual). Hera's statue was brought out of her temple each year during that festival and carried down to the seashore, where it was purified and concealed under willow branches, with cakes set out in front of it; the celebrants would then withdraw, and make a show of searching for the statue and discovering it. The statue can be seen on Samian coins with the willow stems hanging down from it; the vegetation in question (that of *lygos*, or *agnus castus*, 'chaste lamb' in Latin) was symbolic of chastity, here presumably of Hera as a bride. An epigram has been preserved in which the Hellenistic poet Nicainetos explicitly refers to Hera as the bride of Zeus in connection with the Tonaia, and the Roman antiquarian Varro states that her statue was draped with bridal robes, and that her annual rites were celebrated after the manner of a marriage.⁶ It has been argued, however, that the Tonaia may have originated as a fertility ritual that was not connected as yet with Hera's marriage. A cultic legend explained the various procedures by saying that pirates had once tried to steal the statue, but had found that their ship would not sail with it on board and had therefore left it behind on the shore, where the Samians had found it and had tied it down with willow-twigs to put an end to its wanderings;⁷ but as is commonly

the case with such stories, this reveals nothing about the proper meaning of the rites. Another legend claimed that Hera's sanctuary on Samos had been founded by the Argonauts, who had brought her ancient cultic image from Argos.⁸

Most of the local legends and rites that are recorded in connection with the divine union refer to the first prenuptial intercourse between Zeus and Hera rather than to their wedding. It was claimed, indeed, on Samos that the pair had first slept together on that island in utter secrecy for three hundred years.⁹ The *Iliad* already mentions that they first went to bed together without their parents knowing, but says nothing about the circumstances or place of the encounter.¹⁰ It seems that Naxos also claimed to be the place of this prenuptial union, since the behaviour of Zeus and Hera was cited in explanation of a local marriage-custom in which the bride would share her bed with a young boy on the night before her wedding.¹¹ Since Euboea was sacred to Hera, and local tradition asserted that she had been reared there by a nymph called Macris,¹² it is no surprise that similar claims should have been put forwards on that island too. No less than three places were pointed out as the actual site where the union had been consummated, two caves on the island itself and one on an islet nearby.¹³

Another local tradition located the first union at the south-eastern tip of the Argolid near the coastal town of Hermione. On seeing Hera there on her own before the time of her marriage, Zeus set out to seduce her. He assumed the form of a cuckoo and settled on the mountain that was known thenceforth as Cuckoo Mountain (Coccyx or Coccygion); and after stirring up a violent thunderstorm, he flew over to Hera as she was sitting on the mountain of Pron (the Headland) opposite, and alighted on her lap. Feeling pity for the wet and bedraggled bird, she sheltered it under her robe, at which point Zeus returned to his original form and proceeded to make love to her. Although she resisted him at first because they were children of the same mother, she yielded to him as soon as he promised to make her his wife. A temple of Hera Teleia (the Fulfilled, i.e. as wife) could be seen at the supposed site of the incident, and there was a temple of Zeus on the summit of Cuckoo Mountain nearby.¹⁴ The great effigy of Hera at the Argive Heraion showed her holding a sceptre surmounted by a cuckoo, evidently in reference to the preceding legend, as Pausanias remarks;¹⁵ this huge gold and ivory statue by Polycleitos, a distinguished Argive sculptor of the fifth century BC, was thought to rival Pheidias' statue of Athena in the Parthenon at Athens.

A Boeotian legend placed the prenuptial union on Mt Cithairon, on the southern borders of the province. After Hera had been brought up on the island of Euboea, Zeus abducted her to Boeotia on the mainland opposite, and they took refuge on Cithairon, which, in the words of Plutarch, 'provided them with a shady cave, forming a natural bridal-chamber'. When Macris, the Euboean nymph who had reared Hera, came to look for her missing ward, she was warned off by Cithairon (i.e. the tutelary deity of the mountain), who assured her that Zeus was taking his pleasure there with Leto.¹⁶

Cithairon was the site of a remarkable fire-festival, the Daidala, which was celebrated by the Plataians on the summit of the mountain. In the usual ceremony, as mounted by the Plataians, in every seventh year, a wooden idol (*daidalon*) would

be dressed in bridal robes and dragged on an ox-cart from Plataia to the top of the mountain, where it would be burned after appropriate rituals. Or, in the Great Daidala, which were celebrated every fifty-nine years, fourteen *daidala* from different Boeotian towns would be burned on a large wooden pyre heaped with brushwood, together with a bull and cow that were sacrificed to Zeus and Hera. This huge pyre on the mountain-top must have provided a most impressive spectacle; Pausanias remarks that he knew of no other flame that rose as high or could be seen from so far.¹⁷ The cultic legend that was offered to account for the festival ran as follows. When Hera had once quarrelled with Zeus, as she so often did, she had withdrawn to her childhood home of Euboea and had refused every attempt at reconciliation. So Zeus sought the advice of the wisest man on earth, Cithairon, the eponym of the mountain (rather than the god of it, as in the Boeotian legend above), who ruled at Plataia below in the very earliest times. Cithairon advised him to make a wooden image of a woman, to veil it in the manner of a bride, and then to have it drawn along in an ox-cart, after spreading the rumour that he was planning to marry Plataia, a daughter of the river-god Asopos. When Hera rushed to the scene and tore away the veils, she was so relieved to find a wooden effigy rather than the expected bride that she at last consented to be reconciled with Zeus.¹⁸ Or, in another version of the story, Zeus sought advice on his marital problem from Alalcomeneus, the earth-born first man of Alalcomenai in western Boeotia, who helped him to cut and adorn the wooden effigy, which was known as Daidale (the Cunningly Wrought); Hera hurried down from Cithairon, where she had hidden herself, with all the women of Plataia at her heels; but as soon as she discovered the trick, the whole affair ended in laughter and good humour. Alalcomeneus was introduced into the story in this account because the Plataians collected the wood for the *daidala* from a grove of oak trees near Alalcomenai. To pick out the appropriate tree, they would use a process of divination that depended on the behaviour of the crows of the area; for they would lay out some meat for the birds, wait until one of them flew off with a portion, and then observe which tree was chosen by it as a landing-place.¹⁹

Hera's myths of revenge

Although Hera was highly revered as a cultic deity, it was perhaps inevitable in view of Zeus's countless infidelities that she should have been condemned to an undignified role in many of her myths, which frequently present her as a wronged and vindictive wife who is constantly wrangling with her husband and persecuting his mistresses and their children. The main features of this portrait are already laid down in the *Iliad*, in which she sometimes comes close to being a comic figure, but is nonetheless a goddess of strong character and will, who is a worthy match for her husband (even if she is bound to fail in the long run when she tries to oppose him). She risks his anger by intervening on behalf of the Greeks in the Trojan War, after he has warned the gods not to interfere, achieving her aim at one point by seducing him on Mt Ida so as to distract him while Poseidon is spurring the Greeks to success.²⁰ Although Homer has little occasion to mention tales in which she fell out with her husband over his love affairs, he refers more than once to the hatred that she bore

against his son Heracles, reporting that she had once caused such anger to Zeus by sending storm winds against the hero (see p. 263) that he had strung her up with a heavy weight attached to her feet (a form of torture that was inflicted on slaves in classical times).²¹ The various tales from later sources, in which she is said to have harried Zeus's lovers and children (for she could hardly take action against Zeus himself), are considered elsewhere in connection with her victims. These are not actually as numerous as one might suppose; she is not reported to have taken any action at all with regard to most of Zeus's innumerable love affairs. There are in fact only four notable bodies of myth of early origin in which she was said to have taken action in such circumstances, namely those in which she persecuted Leto, while she was pregnant with divine twins by Zeus (see pp. 134ff), and Semele, her son Dionysos and his nurses (see pp. 163ff etc.), and Io, an Argive mistress of Zeus (see pp. 212ff.), and Heracles during his earthly life. She also caused the death of Callisto in some versions of that heroine's legend (see p. 546).

As the guardian of marriage and wife of the supreme god, Hera could not conceivably have had any lovers herself; nor would any god or man normally have dared to lay hands on her. There is only a single myth of any note that tells of an attempt on her virtue, the quite early tale in which Ixion, a mortal protégé of her husband's, was foolish enough to try to seduce her. She merely informed her husband, who laid a trap for Ixion by fashioning a cloud-image of her (see p. 107). Endymion was sometimes said to have been condemned to his eternal sleep (or hurled down to Hades) for a similar offence (see p. 381). As a ruse of war, Zeus himself inspired one of the Giants with lust for her during the conflict between the Giants and the gods (see p. 83).

Like all the great goddesses, Hera could be ruthless towards mortals who offended her. To avenge the impieties of Pelias, who committed a murder in her sanctuary and scorned her rites thereafter, she set in course the train of events that led to his death (see pp. 396ff); after she was passed over in the judgement of Paris, she became an enemy of Paris (sending storms against him while he was sailing off with Helen, see p. 456), and an ardent supporter of the Greeks during the Trojan War; in what was probably the original version of the myth of the Proitides, she sent them mad for mocking the poverty of one of her sanctuaries (see p. 224); for her blinding of Teiresias, see p. 365. In lesser stories, she sent Orion's wife to Hades for claiming to rival her in beauty (see p. 561), and turned Antigone, a daughter of Laomedon, king of Troy, into a stork for the same offence. Or, in another version of the latter story, she turned Antigone's hair into snakes to punish her for boasting that it was more beautiful than her own, but the gods took pity on her and turned her into a stork, a bird that preys on snakes.²²

Hestia, the virgin goddess of the hearth

HESTIA, whose name simply means Hearth in Greek, was the first-born child of Cronos and Rhea, and thus also the youngest child, as the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* remarks,²³ because she was the first to be swallowed by her father and the last to be disgorged. That hymn has occasion to refer to her because she resembled Zeus's

daughter Athena in having scorned the works of Aphrodite, as the only child of Cronos who remained a virgin. A myth of a very elementary kind is offered in the poem to explain how she came to be irrevocably confirmed in that choice, for we are told that Poseidon and Apollo once sought to marry her, but she stubbornly refused and vowed to remain a virgin forever, placing her hand on the head of Zeus to swear a solemn oath to that effect. So Zeus granted her the high honour instead of always remaining at the centre of the house and receiving the choicest portion at sacrifices;²⁴ and it is suggested similarly elsewhere that after the defeat of the Titans, she begged Zeus to grant her everlasting virginity and this special privilege at sacrifices.²⁵ As a goddess who was closely identified with the hearth-fire, and was barely even conceived as a fully anthropomorphic deity, Hestia had little occasion to appear in mythical tales, and thus cannot be said to have had any proper myths, unless a tale that Ovid recounts about her Roman counterpart Vesta can be regarded as such (see further on p. 205). At the most, vase-paintings sometimes show her accompanying the other gods to festal occasions, such as marriage of Peleus and Thetis.

She could normally be imagined, however, as being confined to her place at the centre of the home, and Plato alludes to her predicament (which was also in a sense her privilege) in his great myth in the *Phaedrus*, by stating that when the other gods pass in procession through the sky under the leadership of Zeus, 'Hestia remains in the house of the gods, all alone'. She is thus excluded from the ordinary activities of the gods and yet remains forever at the centre.²⁶ Since fire is naturally felt to be a pure (and purifying) element, Hestia was inevitably thought to be a virgin goddess, and her hearth was tended by the unmarried girls of the household. Thoughts of this nature are reflected in ancient taboos connected with the hearth-fire; Hesiod warns people, for instance, not to expose their naked genitals to it after making love.²⁷ At sacrifices, Hestia would normally receive the first offering or a preliminary libation; in prayers, she would normally be invoked before any other deity; and at feasts the first and final libations would normally be dedicated to her. These practices inspired the proverbial phrase 'beginning with Hestia' (*aph'Hestias archesthai*), meaning to make a proper start or sound beginning.²⁸ When the fire crackled, it could be said that 'Hestia's laughing'.²⁹ The Romans identified her with their own hearth-goddess Vesta, whose name was probably of the same derivation and whose functions were virtually identical, although she was far more important than her Greek equivalent in her public cult as a guardian of the state.

Poseidon, the lord of the seas and the earthquake

In accordance with the initial division of power between Zeus and his two brothers (see p. 67–8), POSEIDON shared power with Zeus in the upper world, receiving the sea as his special domain while Zeus received the sky; but he also had responsibilities that connected him with the dry land, as the god of the earthquake and horses. The main features of his activity are summarized very succinctly in the little *Homeric Hymn to Poseidon*, which refers to him first as the great god of the deep who stirs up the earth and the barren sea, and then goes on to say that the

Earthshaker is the tamer of horses and saviour of ships.³⁰ As this would indicate, the might of Poseidon, whether to protect or destroy, was manifested above all in the power that he exercised over the elemental forces of nature. In his main sphere as a sea-god, he was far more a god of the stormy waters than of the sea at rest; and on land, he was the god of the earthquake, as the Homeric epics already acknowledge, by referring to him as the Earthshaker³¹ (Enosichthon; his titles of Seisichthon and Ennosigaios carry the same meaning). Any violent storm at sea could be attributed to his activity. This is an aspect of Poseidon that is vividly portrayed by Homer in the *Odyssey*, in his account of the god's persecution of Odysseus. On one notable occasion, when Poseidon saw him at sea on a self-constructed raft (after leaving Calypso's island, see p. 510), he

marshalled the clouds and, grasping his trident in his hands, stirred up the sea; and he roused the storm-blasts of every kind of wind, and enveloped the land and sea alike in cloud; darkness came rushing down from the sky, and the East Wind and the South and the tempestuous West Wind and heaven-born North Wind all dashed together as one, causing a great wave to come rolling forwards; and then the knees of Odysseus quivered, and his heart within him.³²

If he could send storms, he could also protect sailors and fishermen from the perils of the sea if properly propitiated; it would be wise to invoke his aid before setting out on a voyage. He could also stir up the sea to the benefit of his worshippers, as when a sea-storm destroyed a substantial portion of the Persian fleet off Thessaly in 480 BC. On hearing of this event, the Greeks paid credit where it was due by pouring libations to Poseidon and founding the new cult of Poseidon Soter (the Saviour) in his honour.³³

Just as he would stir the sea to its depths if he so willed, he would also stir the earth to its depths as lord of the earthquake. In such circumstances, the Greeks would know who to blame or appease. When Sparta, which was particularly prone to earthquakes, was struck by a severe earthquake in 464 BC, the Spartans interpreted this as Poseidon's retribution for an act of sacrilege that they had committed not long before, by expelling and killing some helots (serfs) who had sought sanctuary in a temple of Poseidon.³⁴ He might be appeased in time of earthquake if sacrifices were vowed to him as Poseidon Asphaleios, in the hope that he would hold the ground firm (*asphalos*), or hymns were addressed to him.³⁵ As a chthonian deity, he also performed a gentler and more useful function by causing springs to rise up from the earth. He is sometimes presented as creating them with a blow of his trident, as in the case of the salt-spring on the Athenian Acropolis (see p. 128), or the spring of Amymon in Argos (see p. 218).

Perhaps the most likely etymology of Poseidon's name is the one that presents it as meaning 'Husband of Earth', on the assumption that the second element in it, *-da-*, is an ancient name of the earth-goddess; this is far from certain, however, and other etymologies have been proposed that would link Poseidon's name to the seas or waters. Whatever the origin of his name, he was a very ancient Hellenic deity whose name appears on Mycenaean tablets from Pylos and Knossos; at Pylos, indeed, on the Messenian coast, he was apparently the principal god, of greater importance even

than Zeus. Although he is represented above all as the great god of the seas in Homeric epic and the subsequent tradition, this can hardly reflect his original nature if he was brought to Greece by the Hellenes, since they came from far inland and had no acquaintance with the sea until they arrived in their final home. It would seem that his character must have undergone considerable change in early times as he was developed into a sea-god and then specialized in that function; but the course of that process is now impossible to trace, unless by way of speculation. Accounts of him from the literary record follow the pattern set by Homer, who portrays him in his familiar guise as the majestic and intimidating monarch of the sea, rising from his allotted realm, and journeying over it and plunging into it, and stirring its waters according to his desire. In art, he is shown as a tall, mature, and stately figure, not unlike Zeus in general appearance, but distinguished by his emblem, the trident, and by his wilder and more uncouth appearance, a feature that is emphasized in Hellenistic art especially. The Romans, for want of a better equivalent (for they originally had no maritime gods whatsoever), equated him with a rather obscure water-deity, Neptunus, anglicized into Neptune.

If Hades was sometimes described as ‘another Zeus’, the same could be also said of Poseidon, who was the Zeus of the sea. Homer describes him as living in a golden palace in the depths of the sea at Aigai³⁶ (which should probably be interpreted as a purely mythical location in this context, although there were places of that name in Euboea and elsewhere). His main attribute was his long-handled three-pronged trident, which served both as a sceptre and, in his hands, as a fearsome weapon, even if it originated as a humble fisherman’s tool. He could use it to stir up the sea and to calm it down again, or to split rocks in the open air, as when he caused the lesser Ajax to be cast into the sea (see p. 499), or when, on a far larger scale, he created the Vale of Tempe in Thessaly to allow the river Peneios to flow out into the sea.³⁷ Pindar and Aeschylus compare his trident accordingly to the thunderbolt of Zeus.³⁸ When he passed in procession through the sea, he would be attended by sea-nymphs and the beasts and monsters of the deep. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, his sea-passage and marriage-procession became a favourite subject with artists, who liked to portray him in the company of Tritons (see p. 131), dolphins, and Hippocamps (Hippokampoi in Greek). These latter creatures, monsters with the foreparts of a horse and the hind parts of a fish, are sometimes shown as drawing him in his chariot, or even as carrying him on their back. The splendour of his progress is vividly evoked in the *Iliad*, in a famous passage, which describes how he set off through the sea after descending from the highest peak of Samothrace:

thrice he strode forwards, and with the fourth stride reached his goal, Aigai, where his glorious palace was built in the depths of the sea, golden and resplendent, imperishable forever; there he went, and harnessed a pair of bronze-hooved horses to his chariot ... and drove out over the waves. The monsters of the sea gambolled beneath him on every side; and the sea parted before him in joy as his horses flew swiftly onwards, and the bronze chariot-axle below was not even wetted.³⁹

Poseidon as god of horses

Another feature of Poseidon that is singled out for mention in the Homeric hymn mentioned on p. 124 is his function as god of horses.⁴⁰ Although he was also connected with bulls to some extent, receiving them in sacrifice and sometimes sending them up from the sea in myth (as for Minos, see p. 289), his connection with horses was especially close in both myth and cult. This seems appropriate for a variety of reasons, whether because the horse represented one of the most powerful forces of nature that human beings could dominate, or because horses had chthonic associations, or because they were often credited with the creation of springs in Greek folklore. Poseidon's connection with horses was probably very ancient, perhaps even more ancient than his connection with the sea. He was widely worshipped as Poseidon Hippios (the Lord of Horses), horses played a prominent part in his cult, and legend even presented him as the father of the first horse. Horses were sacrificed to him and kept at his sanctuaries, and chariot races were held in his honour at some of his festivals; and charioteers would invoke his aid before a race, much like sailors at sea. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* refers to an unusual rite at Onchestos, in which charioteers would jump from their chariot after whipping up their horses, and pray for protection from Poseidon in the future if the chariot was wrecked in an adjoining grove (which would have been sacred to the god).⁴¹ But our main concern must be the myths that connect Poseidon with horses and the origin of the equine race.

In heroic myth, his sons Pelias (see p. 396) and Hippothoon are said to have been suckled by mares, and he is said to have given winged or wondrous horses to Idas, and to his favourite Pelops, to help them win their brides (see pp. 148 and 420). His most interesting horse-myths, however, are legends of a more primitive nature, which tell how he was supposed to have fathered notable wonder-horses, or indeed the first horse of all. According to Hesiod, as we have seen (see p. 54), he once slept with the monstrous Medusa, causing her to conceive the winged horse Pegasos, who sprang out of her body (along with Chrysaor) after Perseus cut off her head; and a legend that is no less extraordinary tells how he came to father the divine horse Areion by mating with Demeter while the two of them were in horse-form. As recounted at Thelpousa in Arcadia, where the goddess was honoured as Demeter Erinys, the myth ran as follows. While Demeter was wandering through the world in search of her lost daughter (see pp. 94ff.), Poseidon followed her in the hope of having intercourse with her; and when she tried to hide from him by turning herself into a mare and grazing among some other horses outside Thelpousa, he turned himself into a stallion and subjected her to his will. The products of this union were the horse Areion or Arion (whose name probably meant 'very swift') and a daughter whose name could be revealed to initiates alone. Areion was famous in heroic legend as the horse that carried Adrastus, king of Argos, to safety after his attack against Thebes ended in disaster (see p. 357). It was claimed that Demeter had acquired her local title of Erinys (Fury) because she 'had been enraged' at Poseidon's treatment of her (for the verb *erineuein* could carry that meaning, i.e. to rage like a Fury); and to explain why she was also honoured there as Demeter Lousia (Washing Demeter), it was added that she had washed in the river Ladon after the encounter.⁴²

This myth was recounted in a somewhat different form at another Arcadian town,

Phigaleia, where the above-mentioned unnamable daughter, whose public title among the Arcadians was Despoina (the Mistress, also a title of Persephone), was said to have been the only child of the union. In her old wooden cultic image at Phigaleia, Demeter, who was known there as Black Demeter, was represented with a horse's head, which had serpents and other beasts sprouting out of it.⁴³ The cult of Poseidon Hippios (Lord of Horses) was especially prominent in Arcadia. According to an Arcadian tradition, Rhea saved Poseidon from being swallowed at birth by Cronos by hiding him in a sheepfold near Mantinea (hence the name of a local spring called Arne or 'Lamb-spring'), and giving her husband a foal to swallow instead, on the pretext that their son had been born as a horse.⁴⁴

A legend from Thessaly in the north-east, which was a centre for the breeding of horses, represented Poseidon as the progenitor of the entire equine race. For when he had once been lying asleep in that land (where he was honoured under the title of Petraios, 'he of the rock'), he had shed some of his semen on to the rocky ground, fertilizing the earth and so causing it to bring forth the first horse, Scyphios. Or, in some later accounts, he caused that earth to bring forth Scyphios (and Areion too in one version) by striking the ground with his trident.⁴⁵ Or, in secondary versions that were developed at Athens, Poseidon fertilized the ground at Colonos, just outside the city, to produce the first horse, here called Sceironites, or else caused it to spring from the ground with a blow of his trident while competing with Athena for possession of Attica.⁴⁶

Myths in which Poseidon competes with other deities for possession of Greek lands

Some of the most interesting and distinctive of Poseidon's stories are the local legends that tell how he competed with other deities to gain possession of various lands (i.e. to be adopted as the patron-deity of those lands). In the most famous by far, he competed with Athena for the possession of Attica in a contest that was judged by the Twelve Gods, or by the king of Athens, or its citizens. On arriving first in the land, Poseidon tried to establish his priority by striking the Acropolis with his trident to create a salt-water well, the so-called 'sea' of the Erechtheion (which lay inside the temple, and is said to have produced a sound resembling that of waves whenever the wind blew from the south). Athena arrived next and staked her claim by planting the first of Attica's many olive trees, calling on Cecrops, the first king of Athens, to act as her witness. When Zeus referred the dispute to the Twelve Gods for arbitration, they judged in favour of Athena after hearing the testimony of Cecrops, apparently reaching this decision because they set greater store on the value of Athena's gift (which would be a mainstay of the economy) than on the question of priority. Poseidon was so enraged that he flooded the Thriasian Plain to the north-west of Athens, for a time at least; or else he planned to flood the entire land until Hermes arrived with a message from Zeus ordering him to desist.⁴⁷

The details of the story differ considerably in different accounts. Poseidon stakes his claim in one version, for instance, by causing the first horse to spring forth;⁴⁸ or Athena caused the olive tree to spring up by striking the ground with her spear,⁴⁹

just as Poseidon created the 'sea' by striking the Acropolis with his trident; or with regard to the arbitration, Zeus himself acted as judge, or else Cecrops himself, or his son Erysichthon.⁵⁰ In a curious rationalistic account recorded by Varro, the Delphic oracle advised the people of Athens to decide between the two deities, after an olive and some water had sprung forth as their symbols, and the male citizens (who all voted for the male god) were outvoted by the female citizens (who all voted for the goddess) because the women outnumbered the men by one.⁵¹ Although Athena became the main god of Athens, a reconciliation could be said to have been reached since Poseidon was much worshipped there under various titles, enjoying a cult on the Acropolis itself as Poseidon Erechtheus (a title that links him to the mythical king Erechtheus, see p. 323). As we know from Pausanias, the 'sea' that he had created could still be seen in the time of Hadrian, as could Athena's olive tree, which had miraculously regrown, sending up a long shoot within a single day, after the Persians had destroyed it while burning the sanctuaries on the Acropolis in 480 BC.⁵²

Hera was said to have established her position as the great goddess of Argos through another such contest, which was judged by Phoroneus, the first king of the land (see p. 211), with the aid of three local river-gods, Inachos, Cephisos, and Asterion; Phoroneus awarded the land to Hera, much to the anger of Poseidon, who retaliated by causing the Argolid to run dry for much of the year, turning the land into 'thirsty Argos'.⁵³ He made partial amends later, however, by creating an ever-running spring at Lerna for one of the daughters of Danaos (see p. 218). According to an Argive cultic legend, Poseidon drowned much of the land in his wrath until Hera interceded to cause him to withdraw the flood, hence the origin of the sanctuary of Poseidon Proclystios ('he who dashes with waves', i.e. the Flooder) in Argos, which had supposedly been raised at the place from where the sea-flood had receded.⁵⁴

In similar contests set in the Greek islands, Poseidon had lost Naxos to Dionysos and Aegina to Zeus.⁵⁵ On two other occasions, however, compromises were proposed. When Poseidon competed with Athena to become the lord of Troizen, Zeus ordered the two of them to share the land, and they presided over it jointly ever afterwards, Poseidon under the title of Basileus (King), Athena as Polias (Protector of the City), and Sthenias (the Mighty).⁵⁶ The Troizenians had a flood-story that bears some resemblance to that at Argos (although there is no indication that it was connected with a contest for the land), for it was said that Poseidon had once flooded the land, making it unfruitful with his salt waters, until he had yielded to the prayers and sacrifices of the Troizenians, who worshipped him thereafter outside the city walls under the further title of Phytalmios (Fosterer of Growth).⁵⁷ In another contest set at Corinth, a compromise was proposed by the arbitrator, Briareos (one of the Hundred-Handers, see p. 24), who decided to award the Isthmus of Corinth to Poseidon but the acropolis of the city to Helios.⁵⁸ As to the significance of these various stories, it would certainly be wrong to attempt to interpret them in a simple historical sense, as if they reflected cultic conflicts in the distant past; it would seem, rather, that they express something about Poseidon himself and his place in the city, as an awesome and threatening deity who was highly honoured though not as a patron god.

Poseidon is quite prominent in the *Iliad*, which depicts him as a violent partisan

who does everything possible from first to last to help the Greeks and harm the Trojans. He had reason enough to be hostile to Troy, since Laomedon, the father of Priam, had employed him and Apollo to build the walls of the city, but had insulted them and refused to pay them when they had completed the task (see p. 443).⁵⁹ When the Greeks built a wall to protect their ships, he complained at the assembly of the gods, saying that the fame of this new wall would overshadow that of the wall that he and Apollo had built;⁶⁰ but he intervened to rally the Greeks when the Trojans broke through to attack the ships, helping to turn the tide of the battle until Zeus ordered him to desist.⁶¹ Although Poseidon plays a more restricted role in the *Odyssey*, his hostility to the main hero is a central motif of the poem. He was so angry with Odysseus for having blinded the Cyclops Polyphemos, who was a son of his, that he delayed the hero's return for many years, and finally caused him to be cast adrift in the sea by means of the great storm described on p. 125⁶² (although he survived to be washed ashore on the island of the Phaeacians, see p. 510); and Poseidon also punished the Phaeacians for sending Odysseus home in one of their magical ships.⁶³ In a later epic in the Trojan cycle, he caused part of the Greek fleet to be wrecked during its return voyage (to help Athena to avenge a grave act of sacrilege, see p. 486).

In the subsequent literature, he makes fewer appearances in heroic mythology than one might have expected, being mentioned mainly in connection with his mortal children and the stories of their conception. Other characteristic legends tell how he sent bulls or monsters up from the sea to bring benefit or harm to mortals. He thus sent up a bull as a favour for Minos, although with ultimately disastrous consequences (see p. 289), and another at the request of Theseus to cause the death of his son Hippolytos (see p. 310); and to punish Laomedon, king of Troy, for his double-dealing (see p. 443), and the mother of Andromeda for a presumptuous boast (see p. 227), he sent sea-monsters against their lands, providing an opportunity for Heracles and Perseus respectively to perform heroic deeds.

Poseidon's consort Amphitrite and his children by her and other mothers

Poseidon's consort AMPHITRITE was generally thought to have been a daughter of Nereus, in accordance with Hesiod's account in the *Theogony* (although an alternative tradition presented her as a daughter of Oceanos, and it is stated in one source that she was the mother of the Nereids).⁶⁴ She was a reluctant bride, as was commonly the case with the Nereids, who preferred to live a carefree life as virgins in the company of their parents and many sisters. According to one account, Poseidon abducted her from the island of Naxos after she had emerged from the sea to dance on the shore with her sisters;⁶⁵ or else she fled from him when he tried to court her, and hid herself in the depths of the Ocean near Atlas (i.e. in the far west). In the latter case, Poseidon sent many envoys in search of her, including his special beast the dolphin, who discovered her in the outer Ocean and carried her to Poseidon on its back (or at least let him know where she was hiding). The god was so grateful that he declared the dolphin sacred, and also placed an image of it among the stars, so it came to be suggested, as the northern constellation of the Dolphin

(Delphinus).⁶⁶ After finally becoming the wife of Poseidon, Amphitrite lived at his side in his golden palace beneath the sea, enjoying high honour as the queen of the seas (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1. Theseus under the sea, greeting Amphitrite. G. 104, Attic red-figure cup by Onesimos. Musée du Louvre, France.

Although she is depicted quite frequently in works of art as a goddess of noble aspect, often enthroned beside her husband, she rarely appears in mythical tales. According to a fairly ancient legend, she offered a gracious reception to Theseus (here regarded as a son of Poseidon) when he threw himself off a ship to prove to Minos that he was a son of the god of the sea (see pp. 295–6); and a story of later origin claimed that she caused Scylla to be turned into a monster after discovering that her husband had embarked on a love affair with her (see p. 509). Poseidon and Amphitrite are credited with only a single child in the *Theogony*, the sea-god Triton, ‘who holds the depths of the sea and lives with his mother and the lord his father, a fearsome god’.⁶⁷ Apollodorus adds two daughters, Rhode, the nymph or personification of the island of Rhodes, and Benthesisycyme (Wave of the Deep),⁶⁸ who is remembered only as the foster-mother of the Thracian hero Eumoplos (see p.324). Rhode (or Rhodos), became the consort of the sun-god Helios, whose cult was especially prominent on Rhodes; conflicting accounts were offered of her birth.

Nothing is known for certain about the meaning and origin of the names of Amphitrite and Triton, although it is possible that the common *trito* element (which is also to be found in Athena’s ancient title of Tritogeneia, see p. 155) may have had

something to do with water or the sea. TRITON was pictured as a merman with a human head and upper body and a fishtail. Greek sea-beings of this type probably originated in the native tradition as products of the popular imagination, even if representations of them may sometimes have been influenced by images of eastern deities of such hybrid appearance. Although Triton is presented as a sea-god of some dignity in the passage quoted from the *Theogony*, he makes no significant appearance in conventional mythology except in his specific role as the god of Lake Tritonis in Libya. According to a tale of quite early origin, which was known to Pindar and Herodotus,⁶⁹ he appeared to the Argonauts when they became trapped in the lake during their return voyage, and not only showed them the way to the open sea, but gave one of them a clod of earth from which the island of Thera would grow (see further on pp. 410–11). To explain Athena's title of Tritogeneia, some claimed that the goddess had been reared by Triton in Libya (see p. 155). This god of the lake was presumably a local deity who came to be identified with the Greek god. In vase-paintings from the sixth century BC, Heracles can be seen wrestling with Triton (rather than Nereus in all surviving literary accounts) to force him to reveal the way to the Hesperides (see p. 255; or perhaps to the island of Geryoneus). There are otherwise various tales from Latin sources that refer to Triton's favourite pastime of blowing on the conch-shell horn, an instrument that is his familiar attribute in works of art. Vergil tells how Misenus, a skilled trumpeter who accompanied Aeneas to Italy, was drowned by Triton for his presumption in challenging the gods to compete with him in blowing the conch-shell horn;⁷⁰ and in other tales, he is said to have induced panic in the Giants during their battle with the gods by blowing on his horn, and to have blown his horn after the great flood at the bidding of Zeus to recall the waters to their proper courses.⁷¹

Although there was apparently only a single Triton in the earliest tradition, his name came to be applied in a more general sense to an entire race of fishtailed sea-beings who accompanied Poseidon through the sea and sported with the Nereids. These became a favourite subject with artists in Hellenistic Greece, and eventually in Italy too, especially for the decorative detail of sea-pieces; and female Tritons and Triton families also came to be depicted, an idea foreign to early Greek tradition. As nature-spirits of no very high status, the Tritons entered into folklore in much the same way as mermaids in more recent times, and many stories would surely have been transmitted about them among sailors and people of coastal communities. As so often, we can refer to Pausanias for one or two local tales. Since he had seen two Tritons that had been preserved, one at Rome, and another of larger size at Tanagra on the Boeotian coast, he was able to offer a precise description of their appearance, writing that they had green hair on their head, gills behind their ears, greenish-grey eyes, a finely scaled body, and a dolphin's tail instead of legs and feet.⁷² These sound like the stuffed mermaids of dubious origin that were sold to the unsuspecting in Victorian times. In one account, he had attacked some local women while they were bathing in the sea to purify themselves for the secret rites of Dionysos, who immediately responded to their appeals and vanquished the Triton in a fight. Or, in another version, the Triton had been causing such trouble to the Tanagrans by seizing their cattle when they drove them down to the sea, or even attacking small

boats, that they set a trap for him by leaving a large bowl of wine by the shore; and when he duly emerged from the sea, drained the wine, and fell asleep in a drunken stupor, one of the Tanagrans was able to creep forwards and chop off his head with an axe. As proof of this latter detail, they could point to the headless state of the Triton in their temple of Dionysos; and in this case too, they attributed his downfall to the god since it had been caused by drunkenness.⁷³

After Zeus, who fathered countless children by mortal women, Poseidon was the god who is credited with the largest number of non-divine children. These can be divided into two main groups. As a god who was notoriously wild and unpredictable, Poseidon was naturally regarded as a suitable father for heroes or giants of a violent and uncouth nature; but as a great god who ranked second only to Zeus, he was also introduced into heroic genealogies for much the same reasons as his brother, to be enrolled as the divine founder of local royal lines, or as the divine father of notable heroes without adverse judgement as to their character. His greatest son in the latter group was Theseus (at least in the tradition of his birthplace, see p. 292); Pelias and Neleus may also be cited (see p. 396 for the story of their conception), and Belos and Agenor, the founders of the two main branches of the Inachid family (see p. 216). Others will be mentioned as they arise. Among his wild children in the other group, we find colourful and disreputable figures, such as the Cyclops Polyphemos (see p. 506), the giant hunter Orion (in one account at least, see p. 560), the Aloadai who tried to storm heaven (see p. 84), Amycos who killed passing strangers in boxing matches (see p. 402), the Athenian rapist Halirrhothios (see p. 320), and many of the ruffians who confronted Heracles (e.g. Antaios, see p. 256), and Theseus (e.g. Sceiron and Sinis, see pp. 293ff.) during their travels.

Notes

1 Hom. *Il.* 4.8, Hes. *Theog.* 12, cf. *Phoronis* fr. 3 Davies; Pi. *Nem.* 10.2.

2 Paus. 2.38.2.

3 Paus. 8.22.2.

4 D.S. 5.72.4.

5 Hom. *Il.* 14.346–1.

6 Varro in Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 1.17.8.

7 Athen. 15.672cd, = fr. 6 Powell.

8 Paus. 7.4.4.

9 Schol. *Il.* 1.609.

10 Hom. *Il.* 14.295–6.

11 Call. fr. 75.4–5, schol. *Il.* 14.296.

12 Euboea sacred to Hera, schol. A.R. 4.1138; reared there by Macris, schol. *Il.* 2.535.

13 Steph. Byz. s.v. Karystos, Dirphys and Elymnia.

14 Schol. Theoc. 15.64, Paus. 2.36.2.

15 Paus. 2.17.4.

16 Plut. *In Euseb.* 3.1.6 (= *On the Plataian Daidalia* fr. 3; see Loeb Plutarch vol. 7 p. 44).

17 Paus. 9.3.3–4.

18 Paus. 9.3.1–2.

19 Plut. l.c.

20 Hom. *Il.* 14.153ff.

21 Hom. *Il.* 15.18–28; cf. 14.253–6, 18.117–9, 19.96ff.

22 Transformation of Antigone, Ov. *Met.* 6.93–5, cf. Serv. *Aen.* 1.27, Lactant. *Narrat.* 6.1; latter version, Vat. Myth. 1.79.

- 23 Hom. *Hymn Aphrodite* 22–3.
24 Ibid. 23–32.
25 Schol. Arist. *Wasps* 846.
26 Pl. *Phdr.* 246e–247a.
27 Hes. *W.D.* 733–4.
28 Arist. *Wasps* 846, Zenob. 1.40, Hesych. s.v. *aph' Hestias*.
29 Aristotle *Meteorology* 2.9.6.
30 Hom. *Hymn 22 to Poseidon* 1–5.
31 Hom. *Il.* 7.445, 13.43.
32 Hom. *Od.* 5.291–8.
33 Hdt. 7.192.
34 Thuc. 1.128.
35 Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.4, Paus. 3.11.9.
36 Hom. *Il.* 13.21–2.
37 Hdt. 7.129.
38 Pi. *Isth.* 8.34, Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 924–5.
39 Hom. *Il.* 13.17–30.
40 Hom. *Hymn 22 to Poseidon* 5.
41 Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 230–8. The nature and purpose of the rite is disputed; it seems unlikely that the damaged chariot would have been dedicated to the god and left in the grove.
42 Paus. 8.25.4–7; cf. Apollod. 3.6.8 (Demeter mated with him in the form of an Erinyes).
43 Paus. 8.42.1–4.
44 Paus. 8.8.1–2.
45 Schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 4.138 (both Thessalian versions), schol. Stat. *Theb.* 4.43 (blow of trident, Areion too).
46 Serv. *Georg.* 1.12, Tzetz. *Lyc.* 766 (at Colonos, also called Sceironites).
47 Apollod. 3.14.1, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 164 (Zeus sends Hermes to restrain Poseidon); Paus. 1.26.6 (mark of trident and sea of Erechtheion).
48 Verg. *Georg.* 1.12–14 with Servius on 1.12, Vat. *Myth.* 1.2.
49 Ov. *Met.* 6.72–82.
50 Hyg. *Fab.* 164 (Zeus), Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.10 (Cecrops), Apollod. 3.14.1 (Cecrops and Cranaos, or Erysichthon, as variants).
51 Varro in Augustine *City of God* 18.9.
52 Paus. 1.26.6, Hdt. 8.55.
53 Paus. 2.15.5.
54 Paus. 2.22.5.
55 Plut. *Moralia* 741a.
56 Paus. 2.30.6.
57 Paus. 2.32.7.
58 Paus. 2.1.6.
59 Hom. *Il.* 21.441–57. Apollo was a firm supporter of the Trojans however.
60 Hom. *Il.* 7.445–53.
61 Ibid. books 13–4; warned off by Zeus, 15.185ff.
62 Hom. *Od.* 1.19–21 and 68ff, 5.286ff, etc.
63 Ibid. 13.128ff.
64 Nereid, Hes. *Theog.* 243; consort of Poseidon, ibid. 931–4, Pi. *Ol.* 6.104–5, Bacch. 17.109–11; presented as mother of Nereids, Mel. adesp. 21; she is mentioned as a great goddess of the seas on four occasions in the *Odyssey*, 3.91, 5.421–2, 12.60, 12.97.
65 Schol. *Od.* 3.91.
66 Eratosth. 31, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.17.
67 Hes. *Theog.* 930–3.
68 Apollod. 3.15.4 and 1.4.5 respectively.
69 Hdt. 4.179, Pi. *Pyth.* 4.28ff (Triton not named).
70 Verg. *Aen.* 6.171–4.
71 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.23.
72 Paus. 9.21.1
73 Paus. 9.20.4; on Tritons, see also Ael. *V.H.* 13.21, Pliny *N.H.* 36.4, 7.

Apollo, Artemis, and Athena

The great Olympian deities who remain to be considered were all of younger birth than Zeus and the other children of Cronos and Rhea, with the possible exception of Aphrodite, if she was born from the sea-foam that surrounded the severed genitals of Sky. The mythology of the war-god Ares has already been discussed along with that of the two daughters of Zeus and Hera (see p. 71); as was explained in that connection, there was disagreement as to whether **Hephaistos** was another child of Zeus and Hera, or whether Hera brought him to birth as a child of her very own (see p. 70). Zeus fathered **Artemis** and **Apollo** at the same early period as twin children of the goddess Leto, and also brought **Athena** to birth from his head after swallowing her mother Metis (see p. 73). If **Aphrodite** was a daughter of his, he fathered her by the goddess Dione at the same period (see p. 74–5). He subsequently completed the Olympian family during the heroic era by fathering **Hermes** and **Dionysos** as a result of liaisons with mortal women.

As a radiant god of prophecy, music, and healing, Apollo was the most exalted of the younger Olympian deities, and we will thus begin by examining his nature and myths in the present chapter, along with those of his twin sister Artemis and their mother Leto. The other main virgin goddess among the Olympians, Athena, can also be fittingly included in this company; for she and Artemis were similar in so far as both were virgin goddesses who enjoyed active and often ungente pursuits, Athena as a warrior- and city-goddess who was a patroness of arts and handicrafts, and Artemis as a divine huntress who liked to roam the wilds with her attendant nymphs. The two later-born Olympian deities will be considered in the next chapter, along with Hephaistos and Aphrodite.

Apollo and Artemis, the twin children of Leto

How Leto came to give birth to Artemis and Apollo on Delos

Artemis and Apollo were the twin children of the goddess LETO, who was one of the two daughters of the Titans, Coios, and Phoibe (see p. 37). She aroused the love of Zeus, but nothing is recorded about the circumstances of their relationship, and Leto's mythology is thus centred around her relationship with her children and the

difficulties that she had in bringing them to birth, partly or wholly as a result of the jealousy of Hera. The *Theogony* refers to her as a mild and gentle goddess, and mentions that she bore the two archer-deities to Zeus, but offers no further details.¹ For a full and early account of the events that were associated with their birth, we must turn to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.

As the time approached for Leto to give birth to her twin children, she had great difficulty in finding a place that would permit her to do so on its territory, for although she visited any number of lands, from Crete and Athens to Lemnos and Naxos, all of them turned her away, even the richest, because they did not dare to become the birthplace of Apollo. The reason for their fear is left unexplained until she arrives at the last place that she comes to, the barren island of Delos, which expresses similar reluctance on the grounds that Apollo might be expected to be a very overbearing god who would lord it over gods and mortals alike, and might scorn Delos in particular for its poverty. In the end, however, she manages to persuade Delos to accept her by swearing that Apollo will establish his main sanctuary there, which will be sure to become a source of prosperity for the island.² All the most eminent goddesses came to attend the birth, apart from Hera who remained on Olympos, keeping Eileithuia, the goddess of childbirth, at her side; for in her jealousy, she ensured that Eileithuia received no news of Leto's travail. So Leto suffered the pains of childbirth to no avail for nine days and nights, until the other goddesses sent the divine messenger Iris to Olympos to ensure that Eileithuia would come to her aid. In accordance with the instructions that she had received from them, Iris took her aside in secret to prevent Hera from being able to intervene, and persuaded her to come by offering her the gift of a long necklace strung with golden threads. On her arrival, Leto was at last able to bring her children to birth. Flinging her arms around a palm and kneeling on the soft grass below, she gave birth to Apollo on Delos, and to Artemis, here, apparently, as the second-born, on Ortygia.³ Although Ortygia, which is mentioned twice in the *Odyssey*,⁴ was evidently regarded as a separate place at this stage, it was usually identified with Delos in the later tradition. The geographer Strabo suggested that Ortygia was an old name for the island of Rheneia, which lies just to the west of Delos, separated from it by no more than a narrow strait.⁵

Although the ill-feeling that Hera felt towards Leto is already indicated in the hymn, she manifests it by holding back the goddess of childbirth rather than by trying to prevent her from being able to find a place where she can give birth. In subsequent accounts, however, Leto's problems, in that regard too, are said to have been caused by Hera. According to Callimachus, she told her son Ares and the goddess Iris (who often acts as her special envoy in later literature) to keep watch over the Greek world, and to warn every place that Leto approached that she should not be received there; but poor rocky Delos, then called Asterie, finally dared to resist Hera's threats and invited Leto to come and give birth there.⁶ Or, in Apollodorus' version, she was chased all around the world by Hera until she arrived at Delos, where she gave birth to her twin children, beginning with Artemis, who then helped with the delivery of Apollo.⁷ The latter detail was suggested, of course, by Artemis' function as a goddess who brought help to women in childbirth, and the

order of the two births accorded moreover with the local tradition on Delos, where the birthday of Artemis was celebrated a day before that of her brother. Hyginus records yet another version, in which Hera decreed that Leto should not give birth in any place that was lit by the sun, and the pregnant goddess was pursued furthermore by the Delphian dragon Python, who knew by his own prophetic powers that he was fated to die at the hand of her son. At the bidding of Zeus, however, Boreas, the North Wind, carried her away to Poseidon, who then took her to Delos, known thereafter as Ortygia, and covered it over with waves to cut it off from the light of the sun for a while, so as to enable Leto to give birth there without contravening Hera's decree. Four days after Apollo was born, so the story recounts, he avenged Python's treatment of his mother by travelling to central Greece to shoot him dead (see p. 137).⁸

Leto's sister ASTERIE was sometimes drawn into the legend of the birth of Apollo and Artemis, in a transformation myth, which provided an explanation for the name and origin of the island of Ortygia. The first traces of it appear in an imperfectly preserved poem by Pindar, which states that Asterie was once pursued by Zeus but tried to escape him and dropped into the sea to become the island of Ortygia. It would seem that the poet presented both children as having been born on Ortygia, and identified it with Delos. Later sources confirm what these remains would suggest, namely that Zeus set out to seduce Asterie after rendering her sister pregnant, but she sought to escape him and finally turned into the island. Some mythographers add that she turned herself into a quail (*ortyx*) as he flew, or was turned into one by Zeus, hence the name of Ortygia (Quail Island).⁹

According to a picturesque tale of Hellenistic origin, Leto took her children to Lycia in the south-western corner of Asia Minor after giving birth to them on Delos, and tried to wash them in a local spring called Melita, but was chased away by some herdsmen who wanted to water their cattle there. A band of wolves (*lykoi*) helped her out, however, by showing her the way to the river Xanthos; and after quenching her thirst and bathing her children in the river, she dedicated it to Apollo and named the land Lycia (Wolf-land) in honour of her guides. She then retraced her steps to punish the uncharitable herdsmen. On finding that they were still by the spring, she transformed them into frogs and cast them into its waters, hence the semi-aquatic life that frogs have lived ever since.¹⁰ Or, in Ovid's version, some malicious peasants obstructed Leto and muddied the waters when she tried to quench her thirst at a pool in Lycia, and she punish them immediately by turning them into frogs.¹¹ Apollo has Lycian connections as we will see (p. 140), and Leto herself seems to have originated in Asia Minor.

How Apollo established his oracle at Delphi; the omphalos and tripod

If Artemis showed some sign of precocity in helping to bring her brother to birth, Apollo now gave ample sign of his own wondrous nature by setting off almost immediately to found his oracular shrine at Delphi. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, which provides the earliest account of his precocious exploits, his mother never even offered him her breast, since he was given some nectar and ambrosia

instead by Themis and burst free of his swaddling-clothes as soon as he tasted them. He then exclaimed at once that the lyre and bow would always be dear to him, and that he would declare the unfailing will of Zeus, and wandered off without further delay, to the amazement of all the goddesses,¹² initially travelling around the Greek islands and then making his first visit to Olympus.

After passing through much of northern and central Greece while searching for a suitable place for his oracle, he stopped at an attractive site by the spring of Telphousa (or Tilphousa) near Haliartos in western Boeotia; but Telphousa, the nymph of the spring, was reluctant to share the site with a deity who would far outshine her, and urged him to pass on to Mt Parnassos instead, saying that he would otherwise be constantly irritated by the noise of horses and mules as they watered at the springs.¹³ Although he discovered an ideal spot for his shrine under Parnassos at the site of Delphi, he came to realize that Telphousa must have had ulterior motives in recommending it when he found that it was guarded by a fearsome dragon. Although this monster had previously killed all who had approached it, Apollo shot it dead with one of his arrows, and then returned to settle his score with Telphousa. He punished her by hiding her streams under a cliff (for they had previously risen in open ground); and he subordinated her cult to his own by erecting an altar to himself in a neighbouring grove, where he was honoured thenceforth as Telphousian Apollo.¹⁴ The spring of Telphousa was otherwise noted in myth for its association with the Theban seer Teiresias, who was supposed to have died while drinking from its waters (see p. 366) and to have been buried nearby.

Apollo now had to consider how he could find suitable priests for his oracular shrine. As he was pondering the matter, he noticed that a fine swift ship was sailing from Crete to engage in trade at Pylos on the west coast of the Peloponnese. So he intercepted it on the open sea, leaping on to its deck in the form of a huge awesome dolphin; and as the crew then remained paralysed by fear, he caused it to be blown swiftly up the west coast of the Peloponnese and into the Corinthian Gulf. After bringing it to shore at Crisa, on the southern shore of the Greek mainland near Delphi, he manifested himself in his true divine splendour and revealed his name. He instructed the Cretans to establish a cult to him there as Apollo Delphinios, and to accompany him to Delphi, where they and their descendants would serve as the keepers of his temple, receiving a share from the sacrifices; and with their arrival in Delphi, the Homeric Hymn draws to an end.¹⁵

It is stated in the Hymn that the region of Delphi acquired its old name of Pytho, and Apollo his corresponding title of Pythian Apollo, because the corpse of the dragon 'rotted' there (as though the name Pytho were derived from *pythein*, to rot).¹⁶ The dragon is female in this early account, but it is usually a male creature called PYTHON in Hellenistic and late accounts, and is itself the eponym of the region (although there are also accounts in which the beast is named Delphyne or Delphynes or the like after Delphi¹⁷). Some said that the young Apollo was carried to Delphi by his mother and shot the dragon from her arms, either on his own or with the help of his sister.¹⁸ As we have already seen, there was a myth that claimed that Python had tried to kill Leto during her pregnancy to prevent her from giving birth to her children, and in that case Apollo travelled to the site of Delphi four days

after his birth to kill the dragon by way of revenge.¹⁹ The earth-goddess Gaia was often regarded as the original owner of the oracle. Aeschylus points to a peaceful transfer of power in which Gaia passed it on to her daughter Themis, and Themis to Apollo's grandmother the Titan Phoibe, and Phoibe to Apollo.²⁰

Since the oracle was presented in Delphian tradition as having formerly been the property of Earth, and since snakes are chthonian creatures, we may connect the dragon-slaying, whatever the precise details of the story, with the taking over of the shrine. It is assuredly the case that Python was closely interwoven with the traditions and ritual of the place in historical times. At the great festival of the Stepteria (Festival of Wreathes), for example, the central figure, a well-born Delphian youth, would be led to a lightly constructed house known as 'Python's palace', which would be set on fire. The youth, apparently impersonating Apollo, would then make a show of going into exile, and actually set off on a long journey with attendants and much ceremony, passing by the sacred Pythian way northwards through Thessaly to the Vale of Tempe, where he would be purified; and he would come back afterwards crowned with laurel, Apollo's special plant. Whatever the true meaning of all this curious ritual, there is no doubt that the ancients connected it with the slaying of Python, claiming in the usual account that Apollo had travelled to Tempe to be purified from the killing before he could take over the oracle. Or else, the dragon had fled northwards in a badly wounded state, with the young god in close pursuit, until it finally expired.²¹ At the Pythian Games, which were second only to those at Olympia, one of the leading events was a contest in flute-playing in which the subject was a descriptive piece representing the combat between the god and the monster.²²

Two of the most notable features of the sanctuary were the omphalos and the tripod. The omphalos or navel-stone was supposed to mark the midpoint of the world (as understood in terms of sacred geography). It was conical in form, shaped like an old-fashioned beehive, and was covered with fillets of wool. On a striking ancient copy of it that can be seen at Delphi, the woollen meshes are sculpted on to the surface of the stone. Zeus was said to have discovered the central position of Delphi by sending out two eagles from opposite ends of the earth at the same moment, and then looking out to see where they met.²³ Golden images of the birds were set up by the omphalos, where they remained until they were carried off by Philomelos, a Phocian general who plundered Delphi in 356 BC. Some claimed, however, that the birds of the legend were not eagles at all (which were birds of Zeus) but swans or ravens (which were birds of Apollo).²⁴ Numerous representations of the omphalos are preserved in the visual arts, often showing the eagles too, and it is frequently referred to as the seat of Apollo. Occasionally we find Python coiled around it.

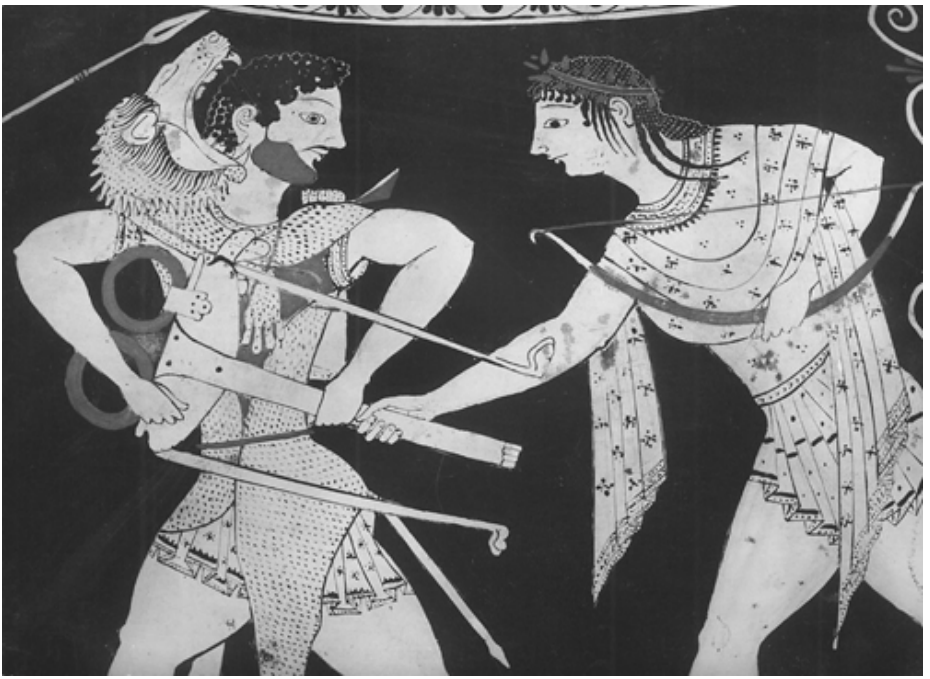


Figure 7.1. Apollo and Heracles struggle for the tripod at Delphi. Red-figure vase, c. 525 BC. Antikensammlungen, Berlin, Germany.

The sacred tripod, which was set up in a sunken area at the end of the temple of Apollo, served as the seat of prophecy, since the priestess of Apollo, who was known as the Pythia, used sit on top of it while delivering the oracles in a trance-like state. It was altogether exceptional for a tripod to be used in this way, and no explanation is offered for the practice in ancient sources. Perhaps it was thought that the holy influence of the god could enter the Pythia from below while she was lifted clear of the ground in this way. It is suggested in Hellenistic and later sources that her ecstasy was induced by vapours that rose up from a cleft in the ground,²⁵ but excavations have revealed no sign of any vent of that kind. Although it was once thought that the idea could be firmly ruled out on geological grounds, the evidence now seems more equivocal. The Pythia was a virgin of Delphian birth who entered the service of the god for life, and always dressed like a girl. Her responses were rendered into verse form (hexameters) by the priests before they were passed on to the enquirer.

The SIBYL (Sibylla), who was the supposed source of many oracles that circulated in writing, was said to deliver her prophecies in a state of inspired frenzy, just as in the case of the Pythia,²⁶ and was sometimes linked to Apollo and Delphi. In the oldest form of her legend, there was apparently a single prophetic woman called Sibylla who uttered her prophecies somewhere in Asia Minor. The village of Marpeessos on Mt Ida in the Troad, an obscure place that is remembered for nothing else, claimed the Sibyl as its own, as did the more important town of Erythrai on the Lydian coast, and there was much controversy on the subject in antiquity. This Asian Sibyl won the favour of Apollo, to whose service she was much devoted, and he

inspired her to give marvellous and infallible, if rather riddling, prophecies; some said that she wandered off to Delphi (among other places) at some stage and delivered prophecies there. The meaning of her name, which may be of eastern origin, is wholly obscure. An ever-increasing number of these oracles entered circulation and they were very popular. They were extant in many places, and many towns claimed accordingly to be the birthplace of their author; or else it was explained that the Asian Sibyl had wandered off to Delphi and elsewhere at some point, and had thus delivered her prophecies at various different places.²⁷ In the end, however, as Sibylla came to be regarded as a generic term, a whole series of Sibyls sprang up, some with personal names of their own, and the tradition became bewilderingly complex. Only the Cumaean Sibyl, the author of the celebrated Sibylline oracles of Rome, needs to be singled out here for special mention, see further on p. 111 and 148.

There is no reason to suppose that ecstatic prophecy as practised by the Delphic prophetess and her more shadowy sisters would have involved any deliberate fraud. The modern practice of spiritualism has made everyone familiar with the fact that certain persons can, voluntarily or otherwise, pass into an abnormal condition in which they can speak, or even write, more or less intelligibly, without being conscious of it at the time or remembering it afterwards. Apollo, like many deities in more recent cultures who speak through prophets or mediums, was doubtless able to find many people with the required capacities to serve him in all sincerity, even if the priests at Delphi may often have altered or developed the Pythia's responses to a greater or lesser extent when preparing the official record. The edited response was generally rendered in verse form in indifferent hexameters, couched for the most part in obscure and enigmatic language, so that the god could always take refuge behind another interpretation if the apparent sense of the prophecy should prove false.

The name, nature, and origin of Apollo

Whatever his origin, APOLLO (Apollon) is the most distinctively Greek of all the gods in the form in which he was finally imagined, and he is still widely familiar today as an embodiment of the Hellenic values of reason, harmony, lucidity, and moderation. We are perhaps inclined to think of him first as the god of prophetic and poetic inspiration. In the former capacity, he is the unerring prophet who knows the true and the right, and the will of Zeus, and reveals them to mortals through his many oracles, though often in enigmatic fashion; and in the latter capacity, he is the leader of the Muses (Mousagetes) and the greatest divine patron of poetry and music, especially that of the lyre. He is a god of purification and healing, whose cultic song, the paean, can serve too as a healing hymn, but he is also the archer-god 'who strikes from afar' and inflicts plague and death with his arrows. Although agriculture is not one of his main concerns, he acts as a protector of flocks and herds, and preserves grain and crops from bad weather, blight, and vermin. In the visual arts, he is shown as an idealized youthful male figure, representing the ideal of the *kouros* or noble youth. His main attributes are the lyre and the bow. Although he was worshipped

throughout the Greek world, his most famous shrines in Greece proper were Delphi on the mainland and the holy island of Delos; and he had many shrines in Asia Minor too, the best known being those at Claros, Branchidai, and Patara. His cult was introduced to Rome at an early period by way of Etruria and the Greek colonies of Magna Graecia, the first temple being erected to him in 432 BC; he was honoured there under his Greek name, having no proper Italian equivalent or parallel.

There is no general agreement on the derivation of Apollo's name. The most interesting of the various etymologies that have been proposed is the one that links his name, in its early Dorian form *Apellon*, to the word *apella*, a Dorian expression for a sheepfold and thence for annual assemblies that were held by the Dorian peoples. It has been suggested that Apollo may have been worshipped by the Dorians from an early period, as a god who watched over flocks and herds, and that he may have been the god who presided over the *apellai*, and perhaps especially over young men's initiations that would have taken place there (for Apollo represents the ideal of the *ephebos*, the adolescent arriving at manhood). No other Greek etymology seems very convincing. The fitting suggestion, for instance, that Apollo could mean 'he who drives away' (i.e. plague, disease) rests on the doubtful assumption that there was a word in Greek corresponding to *pellere* in Latin. It is also possible that his name was of non-Greek origin.

From the time of Homer onwards, Apollo is often called Phoibos Apollo or Phoibos; this title is frequently interpreted as meaning 'Bright' or 'Radiant', but its etymology is by no means certain. As a god who was undoubtedly associated with the idea of luminosity and radiance, Apollo was quite often identified with the sun-god Helios from the fifth century BC onwards (see p. 41). Another notable title of Apollo, of very ancient origin, is that of Lycios or Lyceios, which was interpreted in three different ways in antiquity, as meaning either 'Lycian', or else 'Wolf-god' (*lykos* being a wolf in Greek) or, less plausibly, as signifying that Apollo was a god of light (cf. *lux* in Latin). If the former interpretation is correct, it would refer to the god's activities in warding away wolves from flocks and herds; it has had its proponents, especially among those who set great store on Apollo's Dorian connections. But the first interpretation seems most attractive in view of Apollo's early connections with Asia Minor, and with Lycia in the south-west specifically. The Homeric evidence is of particular importance here. In the *Iliad*, which presents Apollo as supporting the Trojans of Asia Minor against the Greeks, Athena urges Pandaros, a Lycian ally of the Trojans, to vow a sacrifice to Apollo Lycegenes (surely meaning 'the Lycian-born') for his safe return home.²⁸ All the shrines of Apollo mentioned by Homer are set in Asia Minor, and many of his most notable oracles were located at various points on its coast (including Patara in Lycia). Lycia was also linked in various ways to Apollo's cultic centre of Delos; the mysterious poet Olen, for instance, who was supposed to have written certain ancient hymns that were sung on Delos, was described as a Lycian.

Because of Apollo's many connections with Asia Minor, it was once widely argued that he and his cult were imported into Greece from that area. In further support of this view, it was suggested (for instance) that his mother Leto could be identified with the Lycian goddess Lada, and that it is significant that the Greeks should often

have referred to him as Letoides, 'son of Leto', since this accorded with the Lycian custom, as attested by Herodotus, of using matronymics (rather than patronymics as was normal in Greece). The main rival theory, which was of long standing but was rather eclipsed by the Asian theory, proposed instead that Apollo had been imported into Greece from the north. His Dorian connections might be interpreted as favouring such a view, and its advocates also pointed to certain features of his cult, notably the offerings that used to be sent to his shrine on Delos each year by a circuitous route from the north, supposedly from the Hyperboreans (see p. 137), and the great procession of the Stepteria that proceeded north from Delphi (see p. 142), perhaps following in reverse direction the route by which the god had first come to his Delphian shrine. If such theories about the god's origin have rather fallen into discredit in recent times, it is only partly because specific arguments advanced in favour of one view or another have been felt to be unsatisfactory, even if that has often been the case. It is doubtful, for instance, whether the cultic features that were cited in favour of the northern theory can bear the weight that was placed on them, or, on the other side, that Apollo's epithet of Letoides is really of any significance, since other sons of Zeus are regularly referred to as sons of their mother (e.g. Hermes as son of Maia). Even if it can be accepted, however, that Apollo had ancient and definite connections with Asia Minor, as was certainly the case, or with the Dorians and the north, it has come increasingly to be felt that it is pointless to seek for a single 'origin' for a god who was as complex as the classical Apollo, as if he had simply been imported from abroad with his name and cult, and major aspects of his mythology. It would seem, rather, that he was a many-faceted figure who absorbed features from a variety of deities and from the cults and myths of different areas. If some features associate him with the west coast of Asia Minor, or with the Dorians and the north, there are also features that associate him with other areas; in so far as he was a plague-god, for instance, who inflicts pestilence and death with his arrows, he was apparently modelled on the Semitic plague-god Reshep, who caused disease by shooting firebrands. Reshep was worshipped by the Phoenicians in Cyprus, where he was equated with Apollo. Notable features of Apollonian religion such as ecstatic prophecy and purification also associate him with the Near East, while his cultic hymn, the paean, seems to have originated in Crete.

Apollo and Artemis work together to kill the gigantic Tityos and the Niobids

As can be seen in the case of notable examples from heroic legend (see p. 220 and 448), twins tended to be portrayed in myth either as the best of friends or the worst of enemies, and Leto's children can definitely be assigned to the former category. Artemis was sometimes said to have helped to bring her brother to birth, and if she did indeed help in the killing of Python, the two worked happily together from the very beginning. She was often said to have joined together with her brother soon afterwards in any case to kill a giant who presented a threat to their mother. For while Leto was travelling to Delphi after her son had established his oracle there, she was waylaid by the gigantic TITYOS, who tried to rape her. Homer refers to this episode in the *Iliad* to explain why Tityos was subjected to everlasting torment in the

Underworld (where two vultures constantly pecked at his liver, see p. 106), remarking briefly that he assaulted the goddess while she was passing through Panopeus on her way to Pytho (i.e. Delphi). Panopeus lay to the east of Delphi in the same province of Phocis, and a large mound that could be seen nearby was identified as the burial place of Tityos.²⁹ It is reported in the subsequent literature that one, or both, of the children of Leto came to her aid in this moment of peril. According to Apollodorus, she called out for their help, and both of them shot Tityos dead with their arrows.³⁰ This seems to have been the favoured tradition from an early period, as reported by Pherecydes, and portrayed on the Amyclaiian throne (sixth century BC), but some authors pointed to Artemis as having been the sole accomplisher of the deed, while others credited it to Apollo alone.³¹ The *Odyssey* describes Tityos as a son of Gaia (Earth), as might be expected of a giant who is said to have been some nine hundred feet (nine plethra) tall,³² but a Boeotian heroine, Elara, daughter of Orchomenos, is also cited as his mother in the early tradition.³³ According to Pherecydes, Elara did indeed bear him to Zeus, but he was also earth-born in a manner of speaking, because she brought him to birth from beneath the earth after Zeus had thrust her there for fear of Hera's jealousy.³⁴

Another famous myth that presented Apollo and Artemis working together on their mother's behalf, in this case to avenge an insult, is the story of the massacre of the NIOBIDS. These were the many children of NIOBE, daughter of Tantalos, who married Amphion, joint king of Thebes, and bore him so many children, seven sons and seven daughters (or else six or ten of each, the numbers vary), that she grew reckless in her pride and boasted that she was superior in this regard to Leto, who had only a single son and daughter. As first recounted in the *Iliad*, her children were quick to avenge the slight, since Apollo killed all the sons of Niobe with his silver bow, while Artemis killed all the daughters (there being six of each in Homer's account).³⁵ It was sometimes said that Leto herself spurred them to take this action.³⁶

In her sorrow at the loss, Niobe withdrew to the land of her birth in Asia Minor, where she continued to weep for her children until Zeus delivered her from her distress by turning her to stone. The pillar of rock into which she was supposed to be transformed could be seen by the curious in later times on Mt Sipylos in Lydia; according to Pausanias, who came from that area and had climbed up to look at the rock, it bore some resemblance to a weeping woman but only when viewed from a distance.³⁷ Homer already mentions that she was turned to stone on the mountain.³⁸

Forming a natural pair in such stories as two great archer-deities, they were also said to have used their skills to good effect during the war between the gods and the Giants, when Apollo shot the Giant Ephialtes with some help from Heracles, while Artemis shot Gratian or Aigaion.³⁹

Apollo and the Hyperboreans, a mythical people of the far north

Apollo was closely associated in both myth and cult with the HYPERBOREANS, a mythical people who lived at the edges of the earth in the remote north. Their name was interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as indicating that they dwelt 'beyond the North

Wind' (Boreas being the name of that wind in Greek). They established a connection with Apollo and his family from the very beginning, according to Delian legend, for two Hyperborean maidens called Hyperoche and Laodice arrived there shortly after the birth of Apollo and Artemis, bringing thank-offerings that their people had vowed to the goddess of childbirth to ensure Leto of an easy delivery. They died on Delos and were buried near the temple of Artemis, where their supposed tomb could be seen in historical times; the young people of the island would cut off a lock of their hair and lay it on the tomb before their marriage.⁴⁰ These were not the only Hyperboreans who were said to have been buried on the island, for two other maidens, Arge and Opis (or Oupis) were said to have arrived from the north somewhat earlier, at the time of the birth of the twins, and to have been buried behind the temple of Artemis. The ashes from the thigh bones of animals that were burnt on the altar of Artemis would be scattered on their joint tomb.⁴¹ The extreme holiness of Delos made it no place for a burial in ordinary circumstances. Excavations have revealed that the cults of both pairs of maidens were centred on Bronze Age tombs, whose original significance would have been long forgotten by the time the cults were developed. The name of Opis was derived from a cultic title of Artemis herself.

As often said about the inhabitants of mythical realms at the edges of the earth, the Hyperboreans were pictured as being a just and pious people who lived a life free from all toil and conflict, diverting themselves with songs, dances, and feasts; and their company was thus much loved and enjoyed by Apollo, who was said to leave Delphi during the winter each year to spend some time in their land. According to the early lyric poet Alcaeus, he first visited their land very soon after his birth, before even making his first visit to Delphi; for Zeus had given him a swan-drawn chariot to take him to Delphi, but he instructed the swans to fly north to the land of the Hyperboreans instead, and he then stayed with them for a full year, laying down laws for them, before finally setting off for Delphi in the middle of the following summer.⁴² A further tale suggested that he later took refuge with the Hyperboreans for a while to escape the anger of Zeus after killing the Cyclopes (see p. 145), and that amber, a precious substance that reached Greece from the north, was brought into existence as a result, being formed from the tears that he shed during his exile.⁴³ For a conflicting account of the origin of amber, see p. 43. Although the land of the Hyperboreans was hardly accessible to ordinary human travellers, Pindar reports that Perseus had once found his way to it in days of old and saw the Hyperboreans offering huge sacrifices of asses to Apollo, who took a special delight in their feasts and praises.⁴⁴

In historical times, sacred offerings that had supposedly come from the Hyperboreans used to arrive at Apollo's shrine at Delos. Wrapped in wheat-straw and of unspecified nature, they were sent by relay from some unknown location in the north. Herodotus provides a summary of their route, so far as it was known, saying that they were sent to Scythia initially and then passed on by a circuitous route until they first entered Greek hands at Dodona (in Epirus in the north-west); from there they were relayed in a south-easterly direction to the Malian Gulf and across to Euboea, and then down to the southern tip of the island and thence by sea to Tenos

and Delos. They cannot be traced beyond Scythia, however, and their true origin remains a mystery. According to legend, the Hyperboreans had adopted a more conventional procedure on the first occasion, sending two envoys to Delos with the offerings, but when these envoys, the above-mentioned Hyperoche and Laodice, failed to return, had decided that it would be safer to transmit the offerings by relay in future.⁴⁵

Apollo and Coronis, and their son the great healer Asclepios

A healer himself, Apollo was the father of the main god of healing and medicine, ASCLEPIOS (whose name was corrupted into Aesculapius in Latin). Although Asclepios was honoured both as a god and as a hero in cult, it seems likely that he originated as a hero and was raised to full divine status at a secondary stage. According to the standard tradition, Apollo fathered him by CORONIS, daughter of Phlegyas. Although her brigandly father and his people, the Phlegyans, had important Beoetian connections (see p. 560), they were also placed in northern Thessaly, and were sometimes thought accordingly to be related to the Lapiths, a warlike people of northern Thessaly (see pp. 311ff). Coronis for her part was consistently regarded as a Thessalian heroine. According to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, she lived on the Dotian plain in Thessaly, and Apollo apparently fell in love with her when he saw her washing her feet in Lake Boibias in north-east of the province.⁴⁶ She became his mistress and conceived a child to him, but then fell in love with a mortal during her pregnancy, namely Ischys, son of Elatos, a hero of Lapith descent, and so incurred her own destruction. Although the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* already refers to the antagonism that developed between Apollo and Ischys,⁴⁷ we have to turn to Pindar for the first surviving account of the events that ensued. When Coronis took Ischys as her lover, in secret from her father, Apollo came to know of it through his own prophetic powers, and sent Artemis to Coronis' home town to exact vengeance on his behalf. Artemis duly killed her along with many of her unfortunate neighbours; but as the flame was playing around her corpse on the funeral-pyre, Apollo could not bear to see his child destroyed together with its mother, and stepped forwards to snatch it from her womb.⁴⁸ Or, in other accounts, Apollo himself shot Coronis, or he asked Hermes to recover the child from her womb instead of doing so in person.⁴⁹ He was often said to have been informed of her infidelity by his faithful messenger the crow,⁵⁰ in which case it could be explained that crows came to acquire their black plumage because Apollo turned his messenger black (from its original white) in anger at the unwelcome news. Although this familiar detail does not surface in the surviving literature until the Hellenistic period, it has a popular ring and may have been quite old because it can be traced back to the mid-fifth century BC in the visual arts.⁵¹

There were also traditions that claimed that Asclepios was born in the Peloponnese rather than in northern Greece. One such tradition was of respectable antiquity, for it was stated in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* that Apollo fathered him by Arsinoe, a daughter of Leucippos, king of Messenia,⁵² and the Messenians liked to believe accordingly that part of their land had once been ruled by Asclepios, and

then by his sons Machaon and Podaleirios; the supposed tomb of Machaon could be seen there accordingly, at Gerenia).⁵³ According to Pausanias, someone once asked the Delphic oracle whether it was true that this Arsinoe was the mother of Asclepios, and was told on the authority of Apollo himself that the god had been fathered by Coronis, with whom he had 'mingled in love at rocky Epidauros'.⁵⁴ This brings us to another tradition, in which Coronis was indeed his mother, but she brought him to birth at Epidauros in the Argolid rather than in her Thessalian homeland. For, according to the local tradition at Epidauros, which was the most important centre of the healing cult of Asclepios, her father Phlegyas, who was a notorious brigand, once visited the Peloponnese to spy out the land, and brought his daughter with him without realizing that she was pregnant with Apollo; and she exposed her new-born child near Epidauros after giving birth to him during the journey.⁵⁵

Apollo entrusted his new-born son to the wise Centaur Cheiron, who reared him in his cave on Mt Pelion in Thessaly. Under Cheiron's able tuition, Asclepios learned much that was valuable including the art of medicine, which he developed to the highest state of perfection.⁵⁶ He makes no appearance in heroic legend (except in one or two late reports that suggest that he sailed with the Argonauts or joined the hunt for the Calydonian boar⁵⁷). By a wife who is variously named, though always called Epione in connection with his cult, he fathered a family of dual nature in accordance with his own mixed nature as an ancient hero and a healing-god. As is already recorded by Homer, he was the father of two sturdy epic heroes, Podaleirios and Machaon, who sailed to Troy as joint leaders of a contingent from north-western Thessaly.⁵⁸ Since they had inherited their father's medical skills, they were able to help their comrades as healers and surgeons as well as supporting them in battle, and were valued all the more highly as a result. When Machaon is wounded on one occasion in the *Iliad*, the Cretan leader Idomoneus shows great concern, remarking that a healer is a man who is worth many others because of his skill in cutting out arrows and spreading soothing medicines on wounds.⁵⁹ The healing of the great archer Philoctetes is ascribed in particular to one or other of them,⁶⁰ see further on p. 480. Asclepios was also credited with children of another kind, however, in connection with his healing cult, a series of pale and shadowy figures without any myths who personify various concepts associated with the art of healing. Among them we find Hygeia (Health personified), who may often be seen in works of art either on her own or standing by her seated father, and Iaso (Healing), Panacea (Cure-all, cf. panacea in Latin and English) and the little hooded child-god Telesphoros (Accomplisher).⁶¹



Figure 7.2. Apollo and the Crow. White ground kylix, fifth century BC. Delphi Museum, Greece.

According to Apollodorus, Athena had provided Asclepios with blood from the Gorgon Medusa, and he used that which had come from veins on her left side (i.e. the side of ill omen) to put people to death, and that which had come from the right side to restore people to life.⁶² He was said to have acquired the latter skill in any case, and it is variously suggested that he revived Hippolytos at the request of Artemis (see p. 311), or Lycourgos, son of Pronax, and Capaneus, two Argives who died during the first Theban War, or Tyndareos, king of Sparta, or Glaucos, son of Minos; or in some late accounts, he even revived so many mortals that Hades was impelled to complain. Zeus was so angered by his presumption in interfering with the established course of nature that he finally struck him dead with a thunderbolt.⁶³ Asclepios was widely honoured in cult, initially as a hero and later as a god, Epidauros on the east coast of the Argolid was the most important centre of his healing cult. The sick would sleep in his sanctuary overnight in the hope of receiving a dream or vision in which he would reveal an appropriate cure. Snakes were emblematic of his person and cult, and he was often portrayed as holding a staff with a snake coiled around it, hence the modern medical symbol. In astral mythology, Zeus was said to have raised him to the sky after his death, out of regard for Apollo, to become the constellation Ophiuchus (the Serpent-holder).⁶⁴

Apollo's servitude to Admetos, and the story of Alcestis

Apollo was naturally very angry with Zeus for having killed his son, but he could hardly exact vengeance on his mighty father even if he had dared to try, and he thus consoled himself by killing the Cyclopes who had fashioned Zeus's thunderbolt. Now

having reason to be angry in his turn, Zeus threatened to hurl him down to Tartaros, but his mother Leto intervened on his behalf. So, to atone for killing these beings who belonged to his own divine family, Zeus ordered that he should serve a mortal master as a serf for a year.⁶⁵ This was an ancient story that was recounted in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*. Pherecydes, the first author who is definitely known to have named Apollo's master as Admetos, suggested that Apollo had killed the sons of the Cyclopes rather than the Cyclopes themselves,⁶⁶ presumably because the Cyclopes might be expected to be immortal as brothers of the Titans.

Since ADMETOS, son of Pheres, the king of Pherai in Thessaly, showed himself to be an eminently just and considerate master, Apollo's servitude proved to be less humiliating than it might have been, and he repaid the king for his kindness by performing various services for him.⁶⁷ So while tending his cattle, for instance, he greatly increased their numbers by causing them to produce twins at every birth, and above all he helped Admetos to win his chosen bride, ALCESTIS. Since her father, the brutal tyrant Pelias who sent Jason on his dangerous quest, had set a highly dangerous if not impossible task for her suitors, saying that he would give her only to the one who could yoke a lion and a boar to a chariot, Apollo yoked a chariot in that way and brought it to Admetos, who then drove it off to Iolcos to display it to Pelias.⁶⁸

Although the king handed his daughter over in accordance with his promise, Admetos soon had occasion to call on the help of Apollo once again, for he forgot to honour Artemis while offering the wedding-sacrifices, so angering the goddess that she filled his wedding-chamber with coils of snakes as a portent of early death. Not only did Apollo explain the cause of the trouble and advise Admetos on how to propitiate the goddess, but he also visited the Moirai (Fates) and persuaded them to agree that Admetos should be granted a reprieve from death, when the occasion arose, if another person would consent to die in his place. According to Aeschylus, he won this concession from these inexorable deities by softening their hearts with wine.⁶⁹

When some years had passed and the time came for Admetos to die, he looked for someone who might be willing to take his place, but no one, not even his aged father or mother, would agree to do so until his wife volunteered for the task. So it was she who was summoned to the shades when the fatal day arrived. Although Admetos' acceptance of his wife's self-sacrifice might strike us as ignoble and cowardly, few would have felt any discomfort over the matter when the legend was first developed, since a woman's life was not regarded as being of equivalent value to that of a man, and Alcestis was acclaimed accordingly as an exemplar of wifely devotion. It hardly seemed fair, all the same, that she should actually have to fulfil her offer, and the tradition thus contrived that she should somehow escape from death. In the earliest surviving account by Euripides, she found a saviour in Heracles as we will see; but there was also another version, first mentioned by Plato but quite possibly of ancient origin, in which the infernal gods (or Persephone specifically) sent her home again because they so admired her self-sacrifice.⁷⁰

In Euripides' *Alcestis*, Heracles calls in on Admetos while travelling north to fetch the mares of Diomedes of Thrace as his eighth labour (see p. 249), arriving at his

home by sheer mischance on the very day on which Alcestis is due to die, just as Admetos and his household are beginning their period of mourning. Even in such an extremity, however, the claims of hospitality cannot be ignored; so Admetos tactfully pretends that no member of his family is dead, but merely an outsider who had been staying under his roof, and welcomes the hero as a guest, ordering his servants to see to his comfort.⁷¹ But Heracles soon discovers the true state of affairs from a servant, and takes measures to put things right. According to popular belief, Thanatos, Death personified (see p. 58), could be imagined as literally coming to carry off the dead, and Heracles resolves to go to the tomb of Alcestis to await his arrival, so as to wrestle with him to force him to surrender his prey.⁷² This idea of a wrestling match with Death introduces a distinctly folkloric element to the story. To some degree at least, Euripides seems to have been drawing on prior tradition here, since it is known that Death came to fetch Alcestis in a play by the earlier Attic tragedian Phrynichos.⁷³ Alcestis recovers her life as a result of this intervention, and Heracles restores her to her husband at the end of Euripides' play. It is very interesting for the way in which Admetos is presented as reacting when he comes to appreciate the full implications of his behaviour after his wife's departure. He comes to feel that his life is hardly worth living now that he has bought his survival at her expense; but it is never quite suggested that it was actually wrong for him to have accepted her self-sacrifice.

Apollo and Cyrene, and their son the rustic god Aristaos

Another of Apollo's myths tells how he fell in love with the Thessalian huntress CYRENE, and fathered ARISTAIOS by her, a rustic semi-deity who was expert in all kinds of rural skills and pursuits. Although she is mentioned in a fragment from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, which remarks that she lived beside the river Peneios and had the beauty of the Graces,⁷⁴ we have to rely on Pindar for the earliest account of her liaison with Apollo. He describes her as a daughter of Hypseus, king of the Lapiths, who was a son of the god of the afore-mentioned river. Having no taste for spinning or the company of girls of her own age, she preferred to roam the hills of her wild northern homeland hunting wild beasts. Apollo happened to catch sight of her one day while she was wrestling with a huge lion, all on her own without any weapons. Impressed by her bravery and smitten with love, he consulted with the wise Centaur Cheiron, who foretold that he would carry her across the sea to Libya to make her the queen of a great city (for she was the eponym of Cyrene, the most important Greek colony in North Africa). So he carried her off from the windswept vales of Mt Pelion in his golden chariot and slept with her in Libya on that very day, causing her to conceive Aristaos. Hermes took the new-born infant to Greece and entrusted him to the care of the Horai (Seasons) and mother Earth, who fed him on nectar and ambrosia, the food of the gods, to make him somewhat more than mortal.⁷⁵ Or else Apollo entrusted him to Cheiron to be reared in his cave on Mt Pelion; and when he grew up, the Muses taught him the arts of healing and prophecy, and appointed him to watch over their Thessalian flocks.⁷⁶ Or, according to another tradition, he was reared by nymphs who taught him the rural arts that he would later pass on to the

human race.⁷⁷

Aristaios was a culture-hero who was said to have invented many of the crafts, labours, and pastimes of the countryside, such as bee-keeping, olive-growing, the preparation of wool, and hunting in general or some of its varieties.⁷⁸ He married Autonoe, a daughter of Cadmos, king of Thebes, and fathered a single son by her, the great hunter Actaion, who met a premature death in tragic circumstances (see further on p. 335). According to Diodorus' neat little biography of him, which weaves together material of diverse origin, he left mainland Greece forever after this calamity, first travelling to the island of Ceos at his father's order, where he established rituals to relieve Greece from excessive heat in summer (see p. 171), and later wandering further abroad to Sardinia and Sicily, introducing his agricultural arts to these new areas.⁷⁹ He was honoured after his death as a hero, or as a god (in Arcadia in particular).

Vergil and other authors in the later tradition blame Aristaios for the death of Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus (see p. 565), saying that he conceived a passion for her and chased after her, and that she stepped on a poisonous snake and suffered a fatal bite as she was running away from him. Since Eurydice was a dryad nymph, her fellow nymphs took revenge on Aristaios by causing all his bees to die. As Vergil narrates in his fourth *Georgic*, he then sought the advice of his mother Cyrene, who referred him in turn to Proteus, the old man of the sea. By seizing Proteus as he lay asleep and maintaining his grip on him as he repeatedly changed shape, Aristaios forced him to reveal who was responsible for the trouble, and then reported back to his mother. Cyrene advised him to sacrifice four bulls and four heifers to appease the nymphs, and to leave their carcasses in a grove and return to the site nine days afterwards to offer poppies and a black ewe to Orpheus, and a female calf to Eurydice. When he returned to the grove after that delay, bees poured out of the decaying carcasses of the cattle and gathered in a tree nearby, providing him with a new swarm for his hives.⁸⁰ The belief that bees arise from rotting meat was apparently widespread, and not confined to the Greeks; the idea seems to have arisen because there is a hoverfly (*Eristalis tenax*) that closely resembles a bee and lays its eggs in carrion.

How Apollo met with frustration in his love for Marpessa and other mortals, and accidentally killed Hyacinthos

When Apollo fell in love with mortals, things tended to turn out less well for him than in the preceding legend. We have already seen an example of this in the story of Coronis, and he was also displaced by a mortal rival in another early myth, when the Aetolian princess MARPESSA, daughter of Euenos, chose to marry the Messenian prince Idas while Apollo was competing for her love. Homer alludes briefly to the conflict between her two suitors, saying that Idas dared to raise his bow against Apollo for her sake; and although no further details are offered, Idas evidently won his way because we are told that Marpessa lived with him and bore him a daughter Cleopatra (who became the wife of Meleager).⁸¹ The full course of events is first described in an account ascribed to the lyric poet Simonides. Idas, son of Aphareus

(see pp. 448ff), abducted Marpessa from her native Aetolia, so we are told, in a chariot drawn by swift horses, which he had acquired from Poseidon, who is described here as having been his true father. Although Marpessa's father Euenos set off in pursuit, his mortal horses soon grew exhausted, and he gave up the chase on reaching the river Lycormas in eastern Aetolia, where he slaughtered his horses in despair and drowned himself in the river, which was known as the Euenos ever afterwards. Idas continued on his way to Arene in his native Messenia, where he was confronted by Apollo, who had also taken a fancy to Marpessa. When the god tried to take her away from him, Idas drew his bow and prepared to fight for her, but Zeus intervened to separate the two rivals, and allowed Marpessa to make her own choice; and fearing that Apollo would abandon her when she grew old, she chose in favour of her mortal suitor.⁸²

Another of Apollo's ill-fated passions was directed towards CASSANDRA (or Alexandra), one of the daughters of Priam, king of Troy. According to a story that first appears in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, she promised to grant her favours to the love-stricken god when he promised to bestow the gift of prophecy on her in return; but once she had acquired the gift, she broke her word and refused to yield to him. Although no god can recall his gifts, Apollo could ensure nonetheless that her ill-gotten powers would prove to be more of a curse rather than a blessing, by bringing it about that she would always be disbelieved even though her prophecies would always be true.⁸³ So when she tried to warn Paris of all the evils that would follow from his abduction of Helen, or to warn the Trojans against bringing the Wooden Horse into their city, her words fell on deaf ears. Although it is never indicated in the Homeric epics that she possessed prophetic powers, this was apparently an early feature of her legend, since she is reported to have delivered prophecies to Paris in the *Cypria*, the first epic in the Trojan cycle; but there is no evidence to show that she was said to have acquired her powers from Apollo in early epic. According to a conflicting account recorded in some late sources, she acquired them in same way as the seer Melampous (see p. 222), for when she and her brother Helenos (also a seer) were once left overnight in the shrine of Thymbraian Apollo during their infancy, some snakes crept up to them and licked their ears.⁸⁴

The relatively late story of Apollo and the Cumaean Sibyl, as recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, seems to have been modelled partly on the legend of Cassandra and partly on that of Tithonos (see p. 44–5). On meeting the Sibyl when she was a beautiful young girl, Apollo fell in love with her and offered her the choice of whatever she desired in the hope of winning her favours. So she pointed to a pile of dust-sweepings on the floor and asked to be granted as many birthdays as there were grains of dust in the pile. Only when it was too late did she realize that she had forgotten to ask for perpetual youth; and since she refused to allow Apollo the liberties that he had been hoping for, he withheld this additional favour from her, and she grew ever older and ever more shrivelled. She was destined to shrink into a tiny creature before eventually dying after a thousand years, in accordance with the number of the grains of dust.⁸⁵ According to Petronius, she was finally hung up in a bottle at Cumae; and when children asked her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?', she would tell them, 'I want to die'.⁸⁶

According to a famous if not very early tale, Apollo's sacred plant, the *daphnē* or laurel, was brought into existence through the transformation of a girl of that name who had aroused the passion of Apollo. In the earliest surviving account by the Hellenistic mythographer Parthenius, DAPHNE was a daughter of Amyclas (an early king of Sparta, see p. 446) who used to roam through the Peloponnese as a huntress with a group of female companions. As a true follower of Artemis, she wanted to have nothing to do with love, but Leucippos, a son of Oinomaos, king of Pisa, conceived a passion for her and managed to win her friendship by disguising himself as a girl and joining her hunting party. As misfortune would have it, Apollo was also in love with her, and he exposed the young man's ruse by inspiring Artemis and her companions with a desire to bathe in the river Ladon. They duly discovered the deception when Leucippos was obliged to undress, and they proceeded to tear the unfortunate youth to pieces; but when Apollo then tried to seize Daphne for himself, she took flight and prayed to Zeus to be removed from human company, and was transformed accordingly into the plant that bore her name.⁸⁷ In all subsequent accounts, Apollo has no mortal rival. According to Ovid, who describes Daphne as a daughter of the river Peneios in Thessaly, she prayed to her father to transform her as she was fleeing the unwelcome advances of Apollo.⁸⁸ She was presumably brought into connection with the Peneios because Apollo was said to have brought the laurel from the Vale of Tempe, a narrow valley that the river passes through on its way to the sea. Or, in another version of her story, she was a daughter of the river Ladon in Arcadia and prayed to mother Earth to save her in the corresponding circumstances; so Earth swallowed her up in a chasm, and sent up a laurel in place of her as a consolation to Apollo.⁸⁹

Apollo proved to be no more fortunate when he turned his affections towards boys; the most celebrated of these was HYACINTHOS of Amyclai near Sparta. He makes his first literary appearance in a poorly preserved fragment from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, as a son of Amyclas, an early king of Sparta who was the eponym of the town of Amyclai (see p. 446); since a discus is mentioned at the end of the fragment, it can be inferred that Apollo killed him accidentally with a discus as in the standard later tradition. Euripides alludes to such a story in his *Helen*, saying that the Spartans performed nocturnal rites in honour of Hyacinthos who was killed by Apollo while they were competing in throwing the discus. According to Ovid, Hyacinthos was struck on the rebound as he reached out to take the discus for his own throw.⁹⁰ Or, in a more elaborate version, Zephyros (the West Wind; or else Boreas, the North Wind) competed with Apollo for the love of Hyacinthos, and was so jealous when the boy chose in favour of Apollo that he caused the god's discus to swerve aside as he was exercising with his favourite;⁹¹ but this is obviously a secondary version, suggested by an account in which Apollo's discus was blown off course by a gust of wind (as Perseus' discus was sometimes said to have been when he killed his grandfather with it, see p. 228). To explain the origin of the hyacinth, a transformation myth was devised in which a red flower marked with the letters AI AI (meaning alas, alas) sprang from Hyacinthos' blood (or ashes) and bore his name ever afterwards.⁹² Evidently a different plant from the modern hyacinth, this seems to have been a form of iris. The name of Hyacinthos is marked by the *-nth-*

component as being non-Indo-European. He originated as a pre-Hellenic deity who was especially honoured at Amyclai and gave his name to the ancient Dorian festival of the Hyacinthia. Whether his main myth was intended to account for his cultic subordination to Apollo, or owed anything at all to his cult at Amyclai, is a matter for dispute. Pausanias visited his tomb at Amyclai, and reports that the Amyclaiian throne represented him as a bearded man rather than a beautiful boy.⁹³ For the story of Cyparissos, another favourite of Apollo who met an early death, see p. 567.

Apollo's contest with Marsyas and other tales of revenge

There are two well-known legends in which Apollo inflicted punishment on mortals in connection with musical contests, both apparently of quite ancient origin, since evidence from the visual arts suggests that they were known in some form by the fifth century BC. On finding the double flute (*aulos*) that had been discarded by its inventor Athena, who had thrown it away because it made her look ugly when she blew into it (see p. 157), the Phrygian Satyr Marsyas taught himself to play it with great skill, eventually becoming so proficient that he dared to challenge Apollo to compete with him in a musical contest. Apollo agreed to do so on condition that the victor could do whatever he wished with the loser, and the Muses were invited to act as judges. When the contest began (or when Marsyas seemed to be gaining the upper hand), Apollo turned his lyre upside down, played on it with consummate skill, and then challenged Marsyas to do the same; and since the Satyr was naturally unable to perform the same trick with his double flute, which has to be blown from the right end as a wind instrument, Apollo was adjudged to be the victor. By way of a punishment, he suspended Marsyas from a pine tree and flayed him alive. His shaggy hide could be seen in historical times at Celainai, a city in southern Phrygia near the source of the river Marsyas.⁹⁴ The river was said to have sprung from the Satyr's blood, or from the tears that were shed for him by the local nymphs, Satyrs, and shepherds.⁹⁵

In another tale of this kind, also set in Asia Minor, Apollo engaged in a musical contest with the rustic deity Pan. Tmolos, the god of the Lydian mountain of that name, acted as judge, and the competitors played in turn, first Pan on his rustic reed-pipes and then Apollo on his lyre; and when Tmolos judged in favour of Apollo, his decision was approved by all who were present with the sole exception of Midas, king of Phrygia, who had been strangely moved by the wild music of Pan. Apollo showed what he thought of Midas' taste in music by transforming his ears into those of an ass. The king was thoroughly ashamed and wore a turban over his ears to conceal the deformity. The secret was inevitably observed, however, by the slave who trimmed his hair, and not daring to reveal the disgrace and yet bursting to talk about it all the same, the barber dug a hole in the ground and whispered the secret into it. He then filled up the hole and stole away, but as misfortune would have it, some rustling reeds grew up on the very spot, and whenever they were stirred by the wind, they betrayed the barber's words to all and sundry by whispering, 'Midas has ass's ears'.⁹⁶ In another version of the story, Midas suffered this punishment for judging against Apollo when the god competed against Marsyas.⁹⁷

The *Odyssey* refers to a tale of a comparable nature in which Eurytos, king of Oichalia (later portrayed as an opponent of Heracles, see p. 258), grew so proud of his skill as an archer that he challenged Apollo to a contest in this other art. The god was so angered by his presumption that he killed him; we are not told whether he deigned to compete with him before doing so.⁹⁸ And according to revenge tales, Apollo killed Phlegyas for trying to plunder his sanctuary at Delphi (see p. 559), and sent a plague against Troy when Laomedon, the king of the land, refused to pay the reward that he had promised to him and Poseidon for building the walls of Troy (see p. 443). He also fought against Heracles when the hero tried to steal the sacred tripod from his oracle at Delphi, but in this case Zeus intervened to resolve the matter before the violence between his two sons was carried any further (see p. 259).

Artemis the virgin huntress

The essential characteristics of Apollo's sister ARTEMIS can be easily inferred from the way in which she is portrayed in works of art, in which she is generally represented as a tall and vigorous young woman who wears a short tunic reaching to her knees, carries a bow and quiver, and is often accompanied by a stag or doe. She is invariably described as a virgin who devotes herself to hunting, and loves wild, untamed lands and the beasts that inhabit them (hence her title of Agrotera, 'She of the Wild', an epithet already applied to her by Homer⁹⁹). Her favourite hunting ground is Arcadia, the mountainous heartland of the Peloponnese, and she likes nothing better than to roam through the wilds in the company of her attendant nymphs, who are vowed to virginity like herself. The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* remarks that she never falls under the sway of the goddess of love, 'for archery is her delight, and the slaying of wild beasts in the mountains, and lyres too, and dancing, and piercing cries and shady woods, and' – the poet adds – 'the cities of just men'.¹⁰⁰ The *Odyssey* speaks of her in similar terms, telling how Artemis the archer roams over the mountains of Arcadia, rejoicing in the pursuit of boars and swift deer in the company of her nymphs.¹⁰¹ A gentler side of her nature is shown in her concern for the young of all living things, whether of wild beasts, as an aspect of her nature as the protectress of wild animals, or of human beings. According to a chorus from Aeschylus, she is kind to the helpless cubs of ravening lions and delights in the tender sucklings of all beasts that wander the wild.¹⁰² Hence her role as a goddess of childbirth, who is appealed to by women in labour, and her titles of Locheia (she of the childbed) and Courotrophos (nurse of the young). She is also a goddess who presides over the initiation of young girls. Although kindly on occasion, she is a formidable goddess who acts as an agent of death, especially with regard to women, and is ruthless in avenging any slight. This side of her nature is much to the fore in her mythical tales, which frequently show her inflicting death and disaster on mortals. As is understandable for a goddess who was connected with the life of women, Artemis came to be associated (or indeed equated) with the moon, to an even greater extent than Hera, but this was a comparatively late development.

Artemis' connection with wild animals connects her, not with any Hellenic goddess, but with the old deity who is often called the Mistress of Wild Animals (a

title suggested by the Homeric phrase *potnia thērōn*, as applied to Artemis in the *Iliad*), a great goddess of very ancient origin who was honoured under various names by the people of Minoan Crete, pre-Hellenic Greece and Asia Minor. As we will see, Artemis was equated with two Cretan goddesses of that type, Britomartis and Dictynna. The etymology of her name is too uncertain to provide any evidence on her origin. It is known from Linear B inscriptions that she was worshipped at Pylos in the Mycenaean period, but her sanctuaries provide very little evidence of any great antiquity for her cult, except at Hyampolis in Phocis. We can be sure that she was originally independent of Apollo and Leto. If she originated as a Mistress of Wild Animals, it must be acknowledged that she has undergone a considerable change, since the Aegean and Eastern goddesses of that type were mature mother-goddesses, while Artemis is young and virginal (except in her cult at Ephesus, where she was represented as a many-breasted fertility-goddess).

The main features of the classical Artemis are already in evidence in the Homeric epics. Even if she was pictured as brave and skilful in the hunting field, and frequently fierce in her character, she was never regarded as a martial-goddess; and although she is described in the *Iliad* as a supporter of the Trojans, she makes no appearance in the battle scenes. On the one occasion in which she engages in hostilities of a kind, in the so-called battle of the gods in the twenty-first book, her contribution is none too impressive, for when she ventures to oppose Hera, the senior goddess beats her around the ears with her own bow and quiver, causing her to run off to her father Zeus in a flood of tears.¹⁰³ It would naturally be wrong to conclude too much about her contemporary status from a burlesque of this kind. Although she is clearly out of place in the military world of the *Iliad*, Homer portrays her in a less unflattering light in her proper environment, in a passage in the *Odyssey* in which he describes the way in which Artemis stands out among her attendant nymphs to illustrate how Nausicaa (see p. 510) stood out among her handmaidens:

Just as when Artemis the archer roams across the mountains, over lofty Taygetos or Erymanthos, taking delight in the pursuit of boars or swift-running deer, and the nymphs of the countryside, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, join with her in the sport, and Leto is glad of heart, while Artemis rises head and shoulders above them all and may be recognized with ease though all are beautiful – so did the unmarried maiden [i.e. Nausicaa] stand out among her attendants'.¹⁰⁴

She was evidently regarded as being of some significance in her own sphere in Homer's time since she is mentioned quite often in both epics as a goddess of wild things and killer of women, and for the part that she played in legends such as the hunt for the Calydonian boar. Homer places a particular emphasis on her function as an agent of death. She sometimes acts on behalf of another god, or of the gods in general, as at the time when she is said to have killed Ariadne because of witness that was brought against her by Dionysos (see p. 297), or Orion because the gods disapproved of his love affair with the goddess Eos (see p. 562).¹⁰⁵ Or, in a more general sense, any sudden or unaccountable death of a woman could be attributed to the arrows of Artemis; when Odysseus meets his mother in the Underworld, he asks her accordingly whether she had died from a long illness or whether Artemis had

killed her with her kindly arrow (for death can be a merciful release); of course this may often be little more than a manner of speaking, as when a woman who died by falling into the hold of a ship is described in the *Odyssey* as having fallen victim to the archer Artemis.¹⁰⁶ Homer is less concerned with killings in which the goddess acts to avenge personal grievances, although he does mention that she killed Laodameia, daughter of Bellerophon, in anger in unspecified circumstances.¹⁰⁷

The Romans identified Artemis with the Italian woodland goddess Diana, who was not unlike her in many respects. The Italian goddess had no native statues of course, so in art the familiar figure of the huntress Artemis (Diane chasseresse) was used for both alike. As has been mentioned, the goddess is typically portrayed as a young and beautiful woman, with her chiton girt up to the knee, generally armed with a bow and quiver, and regularly accompanied by a stag or other beast. She is sometimes portrayed in long robes however. In so far as she came to be identified with the moon, her head may be surmounted by a crescent. Her emblems, besides attendant beasts and weapons, include the torch, which is a common attribute of goddesses of fertility because light is very commonly associated with life and birth. This is a point in which she resembled the goddess Hecate, who also aided women in childbirth and carried torches as a regular attribute.

Revenge myths of Artemis, and her Cretan equivalent or associate Britomartis

Most of the myths of Artemis are tales of vengeance. We have already seen how she joined together with Apollo to avenge offences against their mother Leto, and how she shot Coronis on her brother's behalf. She was naturally no less ruthless in punishing offences against her own person, and was merciless towards those who lost their virginity or ceased to join her on the hunting field, or slighted her in any respect. One such episode was of notable importance in heroic myth, because it provided occasion for one of the great Panhellenic adventures, the hunt for the Calydonian boar; for when Oineus, king of Calydon, forgot to include her when he was once offering sacrifices to all of the gods, she sent a huge boar to ravage his land, see further on p. 384. Or, according to another tale of this kind that has already been mentioned, she avenged a similar offence by filling the marriage chamber of Admetos with coils of snakes as an omen of early death, see p. 145. Perhaps the most interesting of these revenge myths is that in which she demanded the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigeneia to punish an offence that she had committed, for in many accounts of this story, including the oldest, she showed mercy towards Iphigeneia herself, rescuing her at the last moment to render her immortal, or to install her as a priestess of her own cult, see further on p. 463.

Characteristic myths of a similar kind tell how she acted towards erring companions. By becoming her attendant and accompanying her on her hunting trips, nymphs and maidens who attached themselves to her bound themselves irrevocably to the same way of life, and she showed no mercy towards those who lost their virginity or abandoned her company. The most famous of her erring associates (if that is proper term for a victim of rape) was the Arcadian heroine CALLISTO, who

was likewise an ancient figure, and may well have originated as a by-form of the goddess herself (who had a cult in Arcadia, and in Athens too, as Artemis Calliste, 'the most beautiful'). Callisto was raped by Zeus and became pregnant with a son, Arcas, who was destined to give his name to Arcadia (see p. 547). Some months afterwards, when Artemis ordered her companions to undress to bathe with her in the midday heat, she noticed that Callisto was pregnant and drove her away in a fury, and even transformed her into a bear by way of punishment in some accounts.¹⁰⁸ The myth is preserved in many different versions; see pp. 546–7 for a more detailed discussion. According to another tale of the kind, a certain MAIRA, daughter of Proitos, was shot by Artemis for ceasing to attend the hunt after she was seduced by Zeus. She was evidently not killed immediately since she survived to give birth to her child, a son Locros who helped Zethos and Amphion in the building of Thebes. Such is her story as imperfectly transmitted in a brief summary of an account by Pherecydes; it may have been very ancient since Homer includes a Maira among the famous women who were seen by Odysseus in the Underworld.¹⁰⁹ In one version of her myth at least, Cheiron's daughter HIPPE was transformed into a horse by Artemis because she had ceased to honour her and to accompany her on the hunt;¹¹⁰ and Euripides makes a passing reference to a story in which Artemis drove an unnamed daughter of Merops from her company 'on account of her beauty', and turned her into a hind with horns of gold (perhaps the Cerynitian hind, see p. 246);¹¹¹ she was presumably another companion who was raped or seduced on account of her beauty.

If Artemis was harsh in her treatment of erring companions, she naturally showed no pity whatever towards those who offended against her own person. In one account at least of the death of Orion, her only male hunting companion, she killed him because he tried to court or rape her (see p. 562); and she was often said to have contrived the death of the Aloadae because they made advances towards her (see p. 85), and she shot Bouphagos (Ox-eater), an obscure hero of her favourite land of Arcadia, when he tried to rape her.¹¹² When Actaeon happened to catch sight of her as she was bathing in a spring, she contrived his death by turning him into a stag and causing him to be hunted down by his own dogs (see p. 335). In a lesser-known story of that kind, however, she proved to be more lenient in her treatment of a certain Siproites who saw her naked in Crete, for she merely turned him into a woman.¹¹³

BRITOMARTIS was a Cretan goddess who was similar in nature to Artemis and was thus often identified with her; according to Solinus, her name is Cretan and meant 'sweet maid'. In recounting the following myth about her, Callimachus does not identify her with Artemis, however, but describes her as the goddess's dearest hunting companion, as one who was an excellent archer and a slayer of stags. Minos, king of Crete fell desperately in love with Britomartis, so the poet recounts, and pursued her over the hills and crags of the island for nine months as she tried to escape from him, now hiding under lofty oaks, now in the water-meadows, until she finally jumped over a cliff when in imminent danger of being caught, and fell into the sea below. She survived the fall, however, because she fell into the nets (*diktya*) of some fishermen, and she thus came to be called Dictynna (the Lady of the Nets)

from that time onwards.¹¹⁴ This was the name of a Cretan goddess who resembled Britomartis, and was fully identified with her outside Crete; so by means of a false etymology, this myth explains Dictynna's name (which was probably derived from that of Mt Dicte in Crete) as a title that had come to be conferred on Britomartis. To explain why myrtle was never used in connection with the cult of Britomartis/Dictynna, it was added that a myrtle branch had become entangled in Britomartis' clothing during her flight, and that she had therefore hated the plant ever since.¹¹⁵

A supplement to Britomartis's usual tale is provided in an anthology of Hellenistic transformation myths. To escape from Minos, she sought refuge with some fishermen who hid her in their nets; and she then sailed across to Aegina with a fisherman called Andromedes. At the end of the voyage, this fisherman added to her travails by trying to rape her, but she managed to escape by jumping overboard and hiding in a wood on the island. She then vanished without trace; and since a statue appeared in place of her in the sanctuary of Artemis, the Aiginetans founded a cult to her at the place where she had become invisible (*aphanēs*), under the name of Apheia.¹¹⁶ Extensive remains can still be seen of a fine Doric temple that was raised to her there in about 500 BC, replacing a building from earlier in the century. It is difficult to tell when this ancient but obscure goddess first came to be identified with Britomartis/Dictynna; it is quite possible that the identification was relatively late, perhaps originating in the learned poetry of the Hellenistic era.

Athena, goddess of warfare and handicrafts

Athena was a virgin war-goddess, a protector of cities, and a divine patroness of arts and handicrafts. In accordance with her origin as a child who had been conceived by Metis, the personification of cunning wisdom, she was marked out by her wisdom, which would originally have been conceived as practical wisdom that might involve a measure of cunning. The fuller form of her name, Athenaia or Athenaie, was shortened to Athene in epic and to Athena in later Attic usage. She was scarcely less important than Hera herself, and of greater importance in Athens where she was worshipped as the city's patron-goddess. Although scholars have long disagreed as to whether she gave her name to her favourite city or derived her name from it, the latter alternative seems more probable. She appears on a Linear B tablet from Knossos as Atana Potinja (i.e. the Mistress of Atana or Athana), and it has been argued that she may have originated as a Mycenaean palace-goddess who protected the households and citadels of early kings. This would plausibly account for two main aspects of her nature that might seem inconsistent at first sight; her martial character and her connection with peaceful handicrafts, notably weaving and spinning, that were usually practised by women within the household. If she was once a divine protectress of the fortress-palaces of Mycenaean princes, she would presumably have assumed a martial aspect, and would thus have been well-fitted to become the city-goddess of later times, Athena Polias or Poliouchos (of the city, protector of the city), the armed maiden who acted as a guardian of the city, often from her temple on its fortress-hill. Her temple of the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis, which had once been the site of a Mycenaean palace, is still the crowning

monument of Athens. In her other main aspect as a goddess of handicrafts (Athena Ergane), her patronage was wide ranging, even if her original concern may have been the domestic crafts that were exercised in palace households. Her interests were by no means confined to women's crafts, for she could also serve as a patroness to craftsmen such as carpenters, potters, and jewellery makers; in this connection, her cult at Athens was closely linked with that of Hephaistos (see p. 178). From this beginning, she developed increasingly into a goddess of wisdom in general, until late mythographers could consider her a personification of Wisdom in the abstract. She was represented as a moral and righteous deity of whom few, if any, unworthy tales were told. At Rome, she was identified with the important Italian goddess Minerva, who was a patroness of arts and crafts like herself.

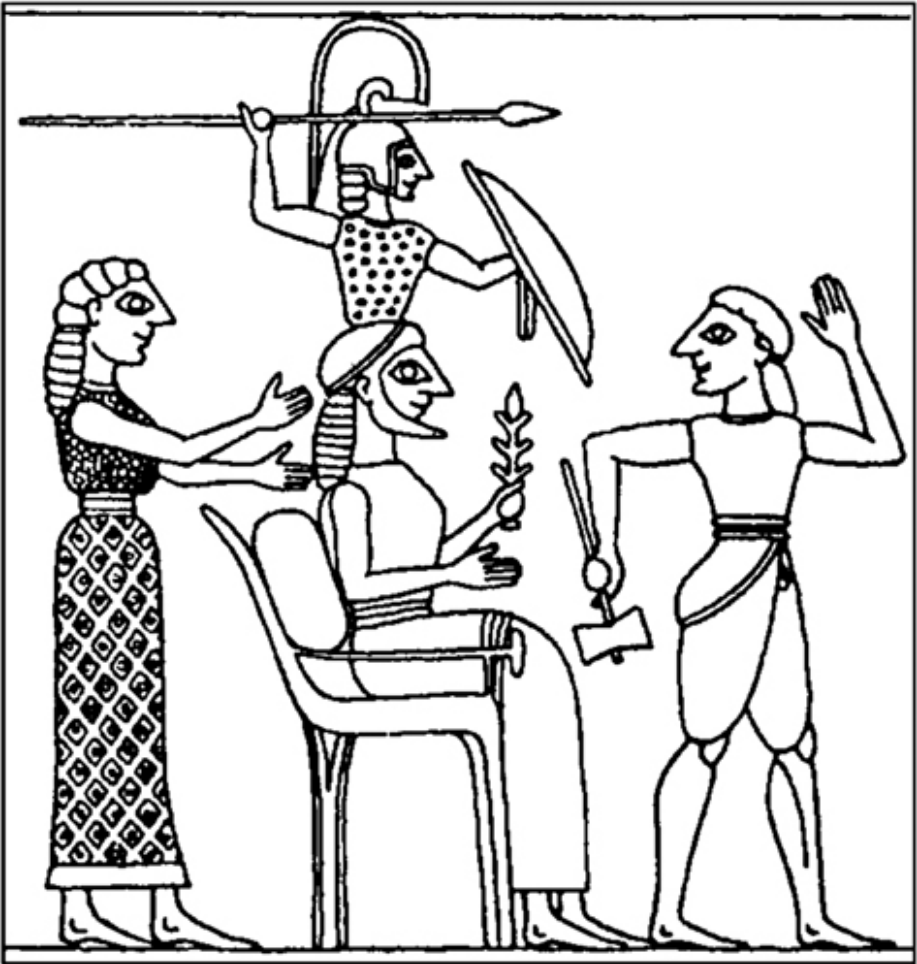


Figure 7.3. Birth of Athena. Drawing from a bronze relief, shield band panel from Olympia, c. 550 BC.

The birth of Athena

Zeus's favourite daughter Athena entered the world in most remarkable

circumstances, as already described in [Chapter 4](#); for her father Zeus swallowed her mother Metis while that goddess was already pregnant with her, and then brought her to birth from his own head (see further on p. 73). According to the *Homeric Hymn* (28) *to Athena*, she sprang forth in full armour, and stood in front of him and shook her spear, presenting such a fearsome sight that the gods were seized with awe, and Olympos reeled, and the earth cried out, and the sea tossed and foamed; and the sun-god Helios stayed his chariot-horses until she had removed the heavenly armour from her shoulders, and Zeus was delighted with her.¹¹⁷ Pindar refers in similar terms to the awesome nature of her advent, stating that she leapt forth with a mighty shout, causing Sky and mother Earth to tremble before her; and the poet adds a further detail, which appears more than a century earlier in the visual arts, by stating that Hephaistos eased her delivery by striking Zeus's head with an axe. Although others were sometimes named as performing this service, whether Prometheus or Hermes or an obscure daimon called Palaimon, the divine blacksmith always remained the favourite choice.¹¹⁸

A further development in the story of Athena's birth was suggested by her ancient title of Tritogeneia (which is of uncertain origin and meaning). This was often interpreted to imply that she was born (*egeneto*) beside one of the various rivers or other waters that bore the name of Triton. According to the best-known story of the kind, she emerged from her father's head by the river Triton or Lake Tritonis in Libya (and was then reared there in some accounts by Triton, the god of the river or lake, see p. 130). Aeschylus remarks in the *Eumenides* that the Libyan river saw her birth, and Euripides indicates the same of Lake Tritonis in his *Ion*.¹¹⁹ Or, according to local legends set in Greece itself, she was reared by the god of the river Triton in Boeotia, or was born and reared at Aliphera in Arcadia after Zeus brought her to birth by a spring there called the Tritonis.¹²⁰ It is quite possible that her title of Tritogeneia implies some connection with water, since the stem *trito* also appears in the names of the sea-deities Amphitrite and Triton.

According to a Rhodian legend, the first men to pay honour to the goddess after her birth were the Heliadai, the sons of the sun-god Helios on Rhodes, who were advised by their father that the people who first offered sacrifice to her would enjoy her presence forever. They acted in such haste, however, that they forgot to light a fire beneath the sacrificial victims, hence (it was claimed) the distinctive Rhodian practice of offering fireless sacrifices to the goddess. She was apparently well pleased by their good intentions, for she granted them skill in all manner of crafts, enabling them to make statues that were so lifelike that they seemed to be alive. This must have been a fairly ancient myth since it is already recounted by Pindar.¹²¹

Athena as a martial-goddess and patroness of handicrafts; her title of Pallas

As might be expected in the case of so important and popular a goddess, a clear idea of Athena's personal appearance was formed at an early stage. She is represented in art and literature as a stately woman with a beautiful but severe face, grey-eyes, and a powerful yet graceful build. She is normally shown fully armed with an elaborately crested helmet, wearing the aegis, which serves her as a cuirass and cloak (see p.

76), and holding a long spear, while the Gorgon's head (see p. 228) may be set on her aegis or shield, and her special bird, the owl, may be seated on her shoulder. In representations of the battle between the gods and the Giants, she is always prominent, and is shown striking down some of the most formidable of the enemy. Her titles constantly bear witness to her warlike character; in various places she is called Promachos (Champion), Sthenias (Mighty), Areia (Warlike, or companion of Ares), and so forth. The other side of her character, as the peaceful protector of her worshippers and their leader in all manner of skilled occupations, is brought out likewise by a series of titles. She is Polias (Goddess of the City), Bouleia (She of the Council), Ergane (Worker), Courotrophos (Nurturer of Children, a title shared by several other goddesses). From Macedonia to Sparta, her importance was second only to that of Zeus himself, whose favourite daughter she was; in Homer, he has his special pet name for her, 'dear grey-eyes',¹²² and pays special heed to her even to the extent of arousing jealousy among the other gods.

Pallas was one of the commonest titles of Athena. Rarely if ever a cultic title, it was regularly applied to her in poetic contexts from the time of Homer onwards. The Homeric epics thus often refer to her as Pallas Athenaie or Pallas Athene, while in the subsequent literature from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* onwards the title is also used on its own, until it virtually becomes an alternative name for the goddess. Its meaning has been disputed since ancient times. According to the most favoured explanation, it means 'Girl' or 'Maiden' (cf. *pallakē*, a concubine), although it was suggested in antiquity that it was derived from *pallein*, to brandish (for Athena was often represented as brandishing a spear, as she was said to have done immediately after her birth in the poem cited above). The title may also have been of foreign origin.

Mythical explanations were also put forward to account for this title of hers. In a lost play by Epicharmos (sixth to fifth century BC), she was said to have taken it from the Giant Pallas, whom she had killed during the war between the gods and the Giants, and had flayed to make a cloak for herself from his skin;¹²³ or according to a tradition that first appears in a fragment from Philodemus (first century BC), she took the title from a female companion of hers whom she accidentally killed, a certain Pallas.¹²⁴ Apollodorus provides a full account of a tale of this kind, in which Triton, a minor sea-god (see p. 130), is said to have reared Athena in company with his daughter Pallas. The two girls used to practise the arts of war together, but this brought them into conflict one day, and as Pallas was about to strike the young Athena with her weapon, Zeus took alarm and intervened to protect his daughter by placing his aegis in the way, causing Pallas to look upwards in alarm and so fall victim to a fatal wound from Athena. In her distress at the loss of her friend, Athena made a wooden image of her, wrapped it in the aegis that had caused her such a fright, and set it up by Zeus's side and paid honour to it.¹²⁵ Apollodorus recounts this story to explain the origin of the Palladion, properly a cultic image of Athena herself, which served as a protective talisman for Troy after Zeus threw it to earth there (see p. 443), and he does not explicitly say that Athena drew her title from the Pallas whom she had accidentally killed, as is stated in the afore-mentioned fragment from Philodemus (first century BC; Pallas is described in it as a daughter of

Palamaon). Another story stated that one of the Giants had been called Pallas and that Athena had killed him during the war between the gods and the Giants, and had flayed him to use his skin as a shield.¹²⁶

It is only natural that a war-goddess should have been interested in the instruments of war, and Athena was credited accordingly with the invention of the war-chariot and of the art of horse taming. According to an interesting myth recounted by Pindar, she was supposed to have come to the aid of the hero Bellerophon in the latter connection after he found that he was unable to harness the immortal, winged horse Pegasus. For when he then slept overnight in her shrine on the advice of a seer, she appeared to him in a dream and presented him with a golden bridle of divine origin, telling him to use it to tame the horse; and he awoke to find that the wondrous bridle was actually lying at his side, and put it to good effect,¹²⁷ see further on p. 221. Warships were also of interest to Athena, and we will see that she supervised the building of the *Argo* (see p. 339), the mythical precursor of the fifty-oared ships (*penteconters*) that were used as war-galleys in antiquity. On the borderline between her peaceful and her warlike occupations we may place her connection with music. She was actually worshipped under the title of *Salpinx* (Trumpet) at Argos,¹²⁸ and the flute (*aulos*, Latin *tibia*, more like an oboe than a modern flute and generally played in pairs) was said to have been invented by her. According to Pindar, she was inspired to invent this instrument and its distinctive music on hearing the wild lamentations that were poured forth by the two surviving Gorgons after the death of their sister Medusa.¹²⁹ Later sources report that she came to dislike her flutes because they distorted her face when she blew into them, and thus eventually threw them away.¹³⁰ They were recovered by the Satyr Marsyas, to his own ultimate detriment as we have seen (see p. 149); in one account, Athena had vowed that anyone who picked them up should suffer for it.¹³¹

As patroness of peaceful handicrafts, Athena presided over arts and crafts practised by men and women alike, but especially over the distinctively feminine accomplishments of spinning and weaving, which were usually exercised in the home by the housewife with the aid of her daughters and servant-women. Homer refers to the goddess's concern for these 'works of Athena',¹³² and mentions her as having fashioned richly embroidered robes for herself and Hera.¹³³ She was extensively worshipped in this connection, and is occasionally shown with a spindle in artistic images, even if such representations are far less common than those that show her in martial guise. At the festival of the Panathenaia at Athens, she would be presented with a robe (*peplos*) that was woven by the women of the city to clothe her great statue in the Parthenon.

A memorable if not particularly early myth, which first appears in Vergil and Ovid, tells how Athena once came into conflict with a mortal craftswoman called ARACHNE, who was the finest weaver in Lydia and went so far as to boast that she could even surpass Athena herself. The goddess appeared to her in the guise of an old woman and warned her to retract her presumptuous claim, but Arachne merely abused her and asked why the goddess seemed to want to avoid a contest. Athena then threw off her disguise and took up the challenge, weaving into her own tapestry the story of her contest with Poseidon for Athens, and, as due warning to Arachne,

the stories of various mortals who had aroused the anger of the gods and been signally punished. Arachne for her part chose for subject-matter a series of scandalous tales of the loves of the gods. Although Athena could find no flaw whatever in her work, she was so aggravated by her success, and doubtless her choice of subject too, that she lost her temper and tore the tapestry to pieces, and beat Arachne repeatedly on the head with her shuttle. In her distress at this treatment, Arachne tried to hang herself, but Athena then took pity on her and turned her into a spider; so she now hangs on a silken thread, and continues to weave with consummate skill in her new form as an arachnid.¹³⁴

Even if she gives way to a show of temper in the myth of Arachne, Athena was usually presented as being benevolent in her dealings with mortals. She would provide technical assistance in enterprises such as the construction of the *Argo* or the Wooden Horse, and was always ready to offer support and advice to favoured heroes such as Perseus and Heracles. She supported the Greeks in the Trojan War, as might be expected after her defeat in the judgement of Paris, and plays a prominent role in the *Odyssey*, providing invaluable assistance to Odysseus and his son Telemachos. In her one notable revenge-story from the early tradition, she sent a violent storm against the Greek fleet after the Trojan War to avenge a grave act of sacrilege committed during the sack of Troy (see p. 486); and in a myth, which first appears in the Hellenistic period, she blinded Teiresias because he stumbled across her while she was naked, although Zeus granted him some measure of compensation afterwards by endowing him with the gift of prophecy (see p. 365).

Athena and her Athenian foster-son Erichthonios

It is only to be expected that special legends should have been developed to account for Athena's close relationship with Athens. According to a familiar tale, which has already been recounted (see p. 127–8), she initially established herself as the patron-goddess of Attica by defeating Poseidon in a contest for the land. As we saw above, this particular legend follows a fairly common pattern, for Poseidon was said to have met with failure (or limited success) in contests for a variety of lands, including Argos, where he was defeated by Hera. The Athenians had a further legend, however, of a wholly distinctive nature, which told how Athena established an even closer connection with Athens by becoming the 'mother' (so far as this was possible for a virgin goddess) of Erichthonios, the autochthonous ancestor of the Athenian people. Although the remarkable myth of his conception is recorded in differing forms, the basic story is always the same: Hephaistos tried to make love to Athena, but she repelled him in such circumstances that he emitted some semen on to the ground, causing it to become fertilized. Even if she could not be the mother of the child, she was thus involved in his conception; and she claimed him as her own by adopting and rearing him after he was brought to birth.

In one account, Hephaistos fell in love with Athena and tried to court her, but she sought to escape him by hiding in Attica at a place called the Hephaistion, which supposedly owed its name to this incident; and when he caught and embraced her in a state of high excitement, she thrust him away with her spear, causing him to

ejaculate on to the ground.¹³⁵ Or, when Hephaistos returned to Olympos after being hurled down to the earth by his mother, Zeus allowed him the choice of whatever he most desired, and he asked to marry Athena; but Athena had no intention of allowing any such thing, and defended her virginity by force when he came to claim her, with the same consequences as above.¹³⁶ Or, in yet another version, Hephaistos once chased after her with amorous intent when she visited him to acquire some weaponry, for he was feeling frustrated after he had been abandoned by Aphrodite. She resisted him with such vigour, however, that he ejaculated over her leg; and she wiped the semen away in disgust with a piece of wool and hurled it to the ground.¹³⁷ The latter detail was inserted to provide an explanation for the name of Erichthonios, who could thus be said to have been born from the ground, *chthōn*, because it had been fertilized through contact with the piece of wool, *erion*. This added refinement was by no means essential, however, because it could also be explained that he had acquired his name because he had been born from the ground as a result of the struggle, *eris*, between the two deities!¹³⁸

When the time came for Earth to bring the child to birth, she rose up from the ground to hand him to Athena, who thus became his adoptive mother. Although Athena initially placed him in a chest and entrusted it to the daughters of Cecrops, king of Athens, this proved to be a short-lived experiment for reasons that will be considered later (see p. 321), and she soon received him back again. From then onwards she reared him herself on the Acropolis; and when he grew up, he won the throne of Athens and established the royal line from which the subsequent kings would be descended. He honoured his divine foster-mother by founding her greatest Athenian festival, the Panathenaia (see further on p. 322), and he was buried in her precinct after his death.¹³⁹

This is a most intriguing and ingenious story. The Athenians prided themselves on their autochthony, and Erichthonios is pictured accordingly as earth-born, after the manner of his predecessor Cecrops (and two other primordial rulers in the Hellenistic king-lists, see pp. 318–19). On the other hand, he is no ordinary earth-born ‘first man’ like Cecrops, Pelasgos (see p. 543) and others of their kind who sprang up from the ground without need for a father; for he is conceived to Hephaistos, a god who was worshipped at Athens along with Athena as a patron of handicrafts, and he is brought into a quasi-filial relationship with the virgin goddess herself.

Notes

¹ Hes. *Theog.* 406–7, 917–20.

² Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 25–90.

³ Ibid. 91–119; Artemis on Ortygia, 14–8. See also the shorter accounts of the birth of the twins in Theognis 5–10 and Pi. *Paeon* 12.

⁴ Hom. *Od.* 5.123, 15.404.

⁵ Strabo 10.5.5.

⁶ Call. *Hymn* 4.55–227.

⁷ Apollod. 1.4.1; on Artemis as midwife of Apollo, cf. Serv. *Aen.* 3.73, Vat. Myth. 1.37 (which says that this is why the virgin goddess is invoked by women in childbirth).

⁸ Hyg. *Fab.* 140, cf. Serv. *Aen.* 3.73 (Hera incites Python to pursue the pregnant Leto).

- 9 Pi. *Paeon* 7b.43–52, Call. *Hymn* 4.35–40, Apollod. 1.4.1 (Asterie then turned herself into a quail), Hyg. *Fab.* 53 (transformed by Zeus), Serv. *Aen.* 3.73.
- 10 Ant. Lib. 35.
- 11 Ov. *Met.* 6.317–81.
- 12 Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 115–32.
- 13 Ibid. 214–76.
- 14 Ibid. 277–387.
- 15 Ibid. 388–546.
- 16 Ibid. 363–74.
- 17 Athen. 701c citing Clearchus, Apollod. 1.4.1, Ov. *Met.* 1.438–47, etc.; Delphyne, A.R. 2.706, male form Delphynes, schol. ibid. citing Callimachus.
- 18 Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 1234–58, Athen. 701c.
- 19 Hyg. *Fab.* 140.
- 20 Aesch. *Eum.* 1–8.
- 21 For the Stepteria, Plut. *Moralia* 293c, 418ab, 1136b, Ael. *V.H.* 3.1, Str. 9.3.12.
- 22 Str. 9.3.10, Pollux 4.84.
- 23 Plut. *Moralia* 409ef, schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 4.6.
- 24 Plut. 409ef, Str. 9.419 respectively
- 25 For the alleged vapour, e.g. Str. 9.3.5, Pliny *N.H.* 2.208; see also D.S. 16.26.1–3 for a quaint tale that links the discovery of the oracle to the vapour (some goats and their goatherd came within range of the vapour and experienced its divinely maddening effects; and when news of the matter was noised abroad, it was agreed that this must be an oracle of Earth).
- 26 It is in this connection that she is first mentioned by the philosopher Heraclitus, 22B92 DK.
- 27 Heracleides Ponticus in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.108 (Hellespontine and Erythraean Sibyls), Varro in Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 1.6 (Hellespontine and Marpessan), Paus. 10.12.1–4 (competing claims of Marpessos and Erythrai for the early Sibyl Herophile, who later came to Delphi).
- 28 Hom. *Il.* 4.100–3.
- 29 Hom. *Od.* 11.580–1; burial-place, Paus. 10.4.4.
- 30 Apollod. 1.4.1.
- 31 Pher. 3F56, Paus. 3.18.15 (on Amyclaiian throne), Pi. *Pyth.* 4.90.2 (mentions Artemis alone), A.R. 1.759–62 (mentions Apollo alone).
- 32 Hom. *Od.* 11.571–2 (also source for his height).
- 33 Hes. fr. 78.
- 34 Pher. 3F55.
- 35 Hom. *Il.* 24.599–613, Apollod. 3.5.6 (gives variants on numbers of children), D.S. 4.74.3, Hyg. *Fab.* 9, Ov. *Met.* 6.146–312; see also p. 341 and note.
- 36 E.g. Apollod. 3.5.6.
- 37 Paus. 1.21.4, 8.2.5 and 7.
- 38 Hom. *Il.* 24.614–7.
- 39 Apollod. 1.6.2.
- 40 Hdt. 4.33–4; for hair-offerings, cf. Callim. *Hymn.* 4.291–9 (to Oupis. Loxo and Hecaerge). Paus. 1.43.4. (to Hecaerge and Opis).
- 41 Hdt. 4.24.
- 42 Athen 307c.
- 43 A.R. 4.611–8; cf. Eratosth. 29, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.15 (after shooting the Cyclopes, Apollo hid the arrow in the land of the Hyperboreans).
- 44 Pi. *Pyth.* 10.29–36.
- 45 Hdt. 4.32–5.
- 46 Hes. *Theog.* 59, cf. Pi. *Pyth.* 3.34 (she lived by the lake).
- 47 Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 209–10.
- 48 Pi. *Pyth.* 3.25–46.
- 49 Apollod. 3.10.3 and Paus 2.26.5 respectively.
- 50 Crow first mentioned, Hes. *Theog.* 60, cf. Pher. 3F2, Ov. *Met.* 2.596–632, etc.
- 51 Artemon 569F5 (transformation first mentioned); Ant. Lib. 20.7, Apollod. 3.10.3, Ov. *Met.* 2.631–2, Hyg. *Fab.* 202, *Astr.* 2.40.
- 52 Hes. fr. 50, cf. Apollod. 3.10.3.
- 53 Paus. 4.3.1–2, 3.26.9.
- 54 Paus. 2.26.6.

- 55 Paus. 2.26.4.
- 56 Pi. *Pyth.* 3.45–53, Apollod. 3.10.3.
- 57 E.g. Hyg. *Fab.* 14 and 173 respectively.
- 58 Hom. *Il.* 2.729–33.
- 59 Ibid. 11.504–15.
- 60 E.g. Apollod. *Epit.* 5.8 (Podaleirios), Proclus on *Little Iliad* (Machaon).
- 61 Arist. *Wealth* 701–2 with schol. 701, Paus. 2.11.6–7, Suid. s.v. Epione.
- 62 Apollod. 3.10.3.
- 63 Pi. *Pyth.* 3.54–8 (revived unnamed person for pay), Apollod. 3.10.3–4 (includes interpolation giving alternative names from different sources for the person revived), Hyg. *Astr.* 2.14 (revived Hippolytos), D.S. 4.71.1–3 (revived so many that Hades complained).
- 64 Eratosth. *Epit.* 6, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.14.
- 65 Apollod. 3.10.4, cf. Eur. *Alc.* 1–10; the story was recounted in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, see fr. 54–6.
- 66 Pher. 3F35 (also that Asclepios was condemned to serve Admetos for a year).
- 67 Apollod. 3.10.4, cf. Call. *Hymn* 2.47–54.
- 68 Apollod. 1.9.15, Hyg. *Fab.* 50, 51, schol. Eur. *Alc.* 254.
- 69 Apollod. 1.9.15, Aesch. *Eum.* 723–8.
- 70 Pl. *Symp.* 179b, Apollod. 1.9.15 (mentioned as variant), cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 251, Lucian *de Luctu* 5.
- 71 Eur. *Alc.* 476–567.
- 72 Ibid. 805–60 (Heracles discovers the truth and resolves to rescue Alcestis), 1098ff (restores her to Admetos).
- 73 Phrynichos fr. 3 Snell. Thanatos appears in person at the beginning of Euripides' *Alcestis*, 24–76; Heracles explains that he has fought with him to recover Alcestis, *ibid.* 1140–2.
- 74 Hes. Fr. 215.
- 75 Pi. *Pyth.* 9.4–70; Cyrene's story was apparently recounted in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, see fr. 215–6, but virtually nothing has survived.
- 76 A.R. 2.500–15.
- 77 D.S. 4.81.2–3.
- 78 See e.g. Nonnus 5.229ff.
- 79 See e.g. D.S. 4.82, Paus. 10.17.3.
- 80 Verg. *Georg.* 4.281–558.
- 81 Hom. *Il.* 9.555–64.
- 82 Schol. *Il.* 9.557, citing Simonides (= 563 *PMG*), Apollod. 1.7.8–9.
- 83 Aesch. *Ag.* 1202–12, cf. Apollod. 3.12.5.
- 84 Schol. *Il.* 7.44. In Hyg. *Fab.* 93 the two versions are run together.
- 85 Ov. *Met.* 14.130ff.
- 86 Petronius *Satyricon* 48.8.
- 87 Parthen. *Narrat.* 15, cf. Paus. 8.20 (Daphne here a daughter of Ladon; ends with death of Leucippos without mention of Daphne's transformation), Prob. *Ecl.* 3.62.
- 88 Ov. *Met.* 1.452–567; also a daughter of Peneios in Hyg. *Fab.* 203; laurel from Tempe, Call. fr. 194.
- 89 Schol. *Lyc.* 6, Liban. *Narrat.* 11.
- 90 Hes. *Theog.* 171; Eur. *Helen* 1469–74, Ov. *Met.* 10.162–219.
- 91 Zephyros as rival, Palaeph. 46, Lucian *D.D.* 14, cf. Paus. 3.19.4–5; Boreas as rival, Serv. *Ecl.* 3.63, Vat. *Myth.* 2.181.
- 92 From blood, Ov. *Met.* 10.196–216, Philostr. *Imag.* 1.34; from ashes, Philargyrius on *Ecl.* 3.63; full transformation, Servius on *Ecl.* 3.63.
- 93 Paus. 1.19.3–4.
- 94 Hdt. 7.26 (skin at Celainai, flayed by Apollo), Xen. *Anab.* 1.2.8 (skin, defeated in contest, no details); full narrative, Apollod. 1.4.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 165, cf. D.S. 3.59.2–5.
- 95 From his blood, Palaeph. 48, Hyg. *Fab.* 165, Vat. *Myth.* 1.15, etc.; from tears shed for him, Ov. *Met.* 6.383–400, cf. Vat. *Myth.* 1.15.
- 96 Ov. *Met.* 11.146–93.
- 97 Hyg. *Fab.* 191, Vat. *Myth.* 1.90.
- 98 Hom. *Od.* 8.224–8.
- 99 Hom. *Il.* 21.471.
- 100 Hom. *Hymn.* *Aphrodite* 15–20.
- 101 Hom. *Od.* 6.102–8, translated on p. 151.
- 102 Aesch. *Ag.* 140–3.

- 103 Hom. *Il.* 21.471–96.
- 104 Hom. *Od.* 6.102–8.
- 105 Ibid. 11.321–5, 5.121–4.
- 106 Ibid. 11.171–3, 15.478–9.
- 107 Hom. *Il.* 6.205.
- 108 E.g. Apollod. 3.8.2, Ov. *Met.* 2.401–95; full references will be given in connection with the main discussion in [Chapter 24](#).
- 109 Hom. *Od.* 11.326 and schol. (citing Pherecydes = 3F170).
- 110 Call. fr. 569.
- 111 Eur. *Helen* 381–3.
- 112 Paus. 8.27.17.
- 113 Ant. Lib. 17.
- 114 Call. *Hymn* 3.189–200, cf. Paus. 2.30.3, D.S. 5.76.3–4 (rejects usual story, claims that Britomartis was called Dictynna because she invented hunting-nets), ps.Verg. *Ciris* 284ff, schol. Eur. *Hippol.* 146.
- 115 Call. *Hymn* 3.220–3.
- 116 Ant. Lib. 40.
- 117 Hom. *Hymn* 28 to *Athena*, cf. Stes. 233.
- 118 Pi. *Ol.* 7.35–8 (Hephaistos), Eur. *Ion* 452–7 (Prometheus), Apollod. 1.3.6 (Hephaistos or Prometheus), Lucian *D.D.* 8 (Hephaistos), schol. Pi. *Ol.* 7.66 (Palamaon or Hermes).
- 119 Aesch. *Eum.* 292–3, Eur. *Ion* 872, cf. Apollod. 1.3.6 (born by river Triton) and 3.2.3 (reared by god Triton), schol. A.R. 1.109.
- 120 Paus. 9.33.5 and 8.26.6 respectively.
- 121 Pi. *Ol.* 7.39–53, D.S. 5.56.5–7.
- 122 Hom. *Il.* 8.373.
- 123 Epicharmos fr. 85a CGF Austin.
- 124 Philodem. *de Piet.* p.6 Gomperz.
- 125 Apollod. 3.12.3.
- 126 Apollod. 1.6.2, schol. Lyc. 355; hence her title of Pallas, schol. *Il.* 1.200, Vat. Myth. 1.124.
- 127 Pi. *Ol.* 13.63–86.
- 128 Paus. 2.21.3.
- 129 Pi. *Pyth.* 12.6–12.
- 130 Apollod. 1.4.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 145 (Hera and Aphrodite made fun of her, and she understood the reason when she viewed her reflection in a spring as she played); cf. Melanippides 758, Palaeph. 47, Ov. *Fast.* 6.697.
- 131 Hyg. *Fab.* 165.
- 132 Hom. *Il.* 9.389–90, *Od.* 7.110, 20.72.
- 133 Hom. *Il.* 5.733–5, 14.178–9, cf. A.R. 1.721ff. (Jason's cloak).
- 134 Ov. *Met.* 6.1–145; allusion in Verg. *Georg.* 4.246.
- 135 Eratosth. 13, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.13, both citing Euripides.
- 136 Hyg. *Fab.* 166.
- 137 Apollod. 3.14.6.
- 138 As stated in Hyg. *Fab.* 166; the preceding etymology is merely implied.
- 139 E.g. Apollod. 3.14.6; see further in [Chapter 10](#).

8

Dionysos, Hermes, Hephaistos, and Aphrodite

The myths of three of the younger Olympian deities have yet to be examined, and also those of Aphrodite, who may have been the oldest. The two last-born Olympian gods, who were borne to Zeus by mortal women, were both gods of highly idiosyncratic character, **Dionysos** as a god of wine and ecstasy who could exact terrible revenge if not received with due honour, and **Hermes** as a divine trickster and messenger who was much concerned with boundaries and their transgression. Whether a son of Zeus and Hera, or a son of Hera alone, **Hephaistos** was also a god of rather exceptional character, being something of an outsider among the Olympians, not only because he laboured with his hands as the divine blacksmith, but also because he was partially deformed. If **Aphrodite** was born from the sea-foam that surrounded the severed genitals of Sky, as in the standard account derived from Hesiod, she was born near the beginning of the world as the first-born Olympian deity, as would be appropriate since she represented a force that exerted a strong power among the gods from the beginning, as latterly among mortals too. It makes no practical difference, however, whether she was born at that early period or somewhat later as the daughter of Zeus and Dione, since she was imagined as being forever young and forever supremely beautiful as the goddess of love and sexual allure.

Dionysos, the god of wine and ecstasy

Zeus and Semele, and the birth and infancy of their son Dionysos

Although SEMELE, the mother of Dionysos, is always fully mortal in surviving Greek myth, she was probably a goddess in the earliest tradition, and it has been conjectured that she originated as a Thraco-Phrygian earth-goddess called Zemelo (cf. *zemlya* in the sense of earth in Russian). In all mythical accounts of the god's birth, however, she was a Theban princess, one of the four daughters of the city's founder, Cadmos (see p. 334), who aroused the love of Zeus and met an early death as a consequence. Although Pindar already indicates in passing that she was killed by a thunderbolt, in spite of the love that Zeus felt for her, we have to rely on

authors from the Roman period for any full account of how this came about. As Dionysos himself remarks at the beginning of Euripides' *Bacchae*,¹ the jealousy of Hera was to blame, for as later authors tell us, Hera assumed the form of one of Semele's female friends or attendants (her nurse Beroe, according to Ovid) and persuaded her to ask Zeus to appear to her in his true divine form. For she appealed to her vanity, saying that she ought to be treated with the same honour and respect as Hera, or else suggested that this was the only way in which she could come to experience the full pleasure of intercourse with a god.² So Semele asked Zeus to grant her the choice of any favour that she might wish (or took advantage of a promise that he had already made to that effect), and demanded that he should approach her in just the same way as he approached Hera. Zeus reluctantly agreed and swept into her bedroom to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning, and she died of fright or of the effect of the thunderbolt, and was burned to ashes. Before her body was wholly burned away, however, Zeus snatched her sixth- or seventh-month child from her womb, and sewed it into his own thigh, from where it was subsequently brought to birth at the end of the normal time of gestation.³ Some claimed that the child was already deified by contact with the divine fire, and it is indicated towards the end of the *Theogony* that Semele herself gained divine status.⁴ As Pindar indicates, and later authors state more directly, this could be thought to have come about as a direct result of her having been struck by Zeus's thunderbolt, but there was also another tradition suggesting that she did indeed die but was later rescued from the Underworld by her son, who descended there for that purpose through the bottomless Alcyonian Lake near Nemea in the Argolid. Although the latter version is first reported by Diodorus in the first century BC, there is artistic evidence that suggests it was already familiar by the classical period. Semele was known as Thyone in her new nature as a goddess.⁵

After his extraordinary birth, which may be compared to that of Athena from Zeus's head, Dionysos had to be provided with a nurse or nurses. The *Homeric Hymn* (1) to *Dionysos* observes that there were conflicting traditions about the place of his birth, which was located either at his mother's home city of Thebes, or on Naxos (an island closely associated with the god), or by the river Alpheios in the Peloponnese, or at other places besides; but there is no truth in any of this, so the poet asserts, for Zeus brought him to birth far away from men and in secret from Hera on Nysa, a lofty mountain in Phoenicia. The *Homeric Hymn* (26) to *Dionysos* states similarly that Zeus entrusted his son to the nymphs of Nysa, who reared him in a sweet-smelling cave on the mountain.⁶ In some accounts, Zeus asked Hermes to convey the child to the nymphs of Nysa.⁷ This mysterious place is already mentioned in connection with Dionysos in the *Iliad*, which states that Lycourgos (see below) chased 'the nurses of mad Dionysos down over the sacred mountain of Nysa'.⁸ Ancient scholars offered all manner of conjectures about the location of this legendary mountain; the lexicographer Hesychius writes that it is 'not confined to any one place; we find it in Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Babylon, Erythra (the Red Sea?), Thrace, Thessaly, Cilicia, India, Libya, Lydia, Macedonia, Naxos, the neighbourhood of Mt Pangaion, and at a place in Syria'.⁹ Wherever the nymphs of Nysa may have lived and whoever they may have been, they nursed Dionysos faithfully and became his companions and

followers. According to Ovid, he repaid their kindness by renewing their youth when they grew old; or else he rewarded them by placing them in the heavens as the star-cluster of the Hyades.¹⁰

One of Semele's sisters, Ino, wife of the Boeotian ruler Athamas (see pp. 392–3), is also named as a nurse of the infant Dionysos. The mythographers reconciled the two accounts by suggesting that the nymphs reared him initially but later passed him on to Ino for fear of Hera's anger, or, conversely, that Ino reared him initially until she and her husband were driven mad by Hera.¹¹ According to Apollodorus, who offers the latter version, Hermes brought the new-born Dionysos to Ino and Athamas and persuaded them to rear him as a girl; but when the couple were subsequently driven mad by Hera, Zeus rescued him from the goddess's anger by transforming him into a kid, and Hermes then passed him on to the Nysaian nymphs. The couple paid a heavy price for their services to Dionysos in any case, for while suffering from their madness, Ino threw their younger son into a boiling cauldron and jumped into the sea with him, while Athamas hunted down their elder son in the delusion that he was a deer; see further on p. 394.

The people of Brasiai or Prasiai, a town on the eastern seaboard of Laconia, offered their own distinctive account of the birth and childhood of Dionysos. In contrast to the other Greeks, they claimed that Semele had survived to give birth to him in the normal way, and that her father had enclosed her in a chest with her new-born child and had cast it into the sea. When the chest drifted ashore at Brasiai, Semele was found to be dead, but Dionysos was safe and sound. By a convenient chance, Ino happened to pass by and asked to be allowed to take care of her nephew, and she reared him there in a grotto, which was shown to visitors as the scene of his childhood, and had a patch of ground stretching out in front of it, which was known as the garden of Dionysos. The setting adrift of an erring daughter and her child is a standard motif in Greek myth, as can be seen in the story of Danae and Perseus (see p. 225), or of Rhoio and Anios (see p. 462), and the child who survives such an ordeal is marked out for a special destiny. The present tale diverges from others of the kind in one significant respect, however, that the mother failed to survive; for it was so firmly established that Semele had died leaving Dionysos an orphan that the framers of the local myth accepted this into their story.¹²

The origin and name of Dionysos

Although it was once assumed that it had been settled almost beyond question that DIONYSOS, the god of wine and ecstasy, was a deity of foreign origin who arrived in Greece at a relatively late period, this can no longer be taken for granted. According to the traditional argument, he was introduced into Greece from Thrace after perhaps originating in Asia Minor, and his late irruption into the Greek scene is reflected in some of his most characteristic myths that tell how he had to overcome determined resistance in various parts of Greece. It has often been thought significant, furthermore, that he is barely mentioned by Homer (even if the poet knows something of his wild rites and his conflict with Lycourgos of Thrace). Some of the more recent archaeological evidence seems to point in another direction,

however, suggesting that the name and cult of Dionysos could be of Mycenaean origin. His name has been found on Linear B tablets from Pylos in the Peloponnese, and he was apparently honoured without break at the sanctuary of Ayia Irini on Ceos (an Aegean island to the south-east of Attica) from the early Mycenaean period into Greek times. It has also been pointed out that the Dionysian festival of the Anthesteria must have originated before the Ionian migration (c. 1000 BC), and that there is reason to suppose that the Dionysian festival of the Lenaia was of very ancient origin too.¹³ As regards the name of Dionysos, its first syllable evidently refers to the sky-god (Zeus, genitive *Dios*), but the meaning of the rest is uncertain. It has been suggested that there may have been a word *nysos* (akin to Latin *nurus* or Greek νύος) meaning ‘child’ or ‘son’, or else that this component of the name was connected with the legendary Nysa where the god was said to have been reared.

How the young Dionysos was mistreated by Lycougos and by some pirates

Some of the most characteristic myths of Dionysos are those in which he exacts revenge in his own distinctive manner on those who reject or mistreat him. Two of these myths may be separated from the others as being set during his childhood or at least earlier years, one being an ancient story first recounted in the *Iliad* that tells of his encounter with LYCOURGOS. Homer reports how Lycourgos once chased the nurses of Dionysos down from the sacred mountain of Nysa, striking them with an ox-goad and causing the god himself to plunge beneath the waves in terror. Dionysos found refuge, however, with the goddess Thetis (a Nereid sea-nymph, see p. 49), and Lycourgos paid a heavy price for his impious behaviour, for he was blinded by Zeus and did not live for much longer, having become hateful to the immortal gods.¹⁴ Since the episode is placed at Nysa, and the still helpless god is unable to come to the help of his nurses, the story is plainly set during his childhood, as was also the case with Pherecydes’ account in which the Hyades were acting as his nurses.¹⁵ In the later literature, however, he usually seems to have been regarded as having been somewhat older, and is presented accordingly as being capable of taking care of himself and of his companions; and Lycourgos is now said to have lived in the northern land of Thrace rather than in a purely mythical realm.

In the version recorded by Apollodorus, Dionysos was accompanied by the Bacchantes and Satyrs, who were his usual companions during his adult years, and he arrived in the Thracian kingdom of Lycourgos, son of Dryas, king of the Edonians, while he was wandering around the world after having been driven mad by Hera. He had previously visited Egypt and Phrygia, and would go on to roam as far as India; we will return shortly to this aspect of his mythology. When confronted by Lycourgos, Dionysos took refuge beneath the sea with Thetis as in the Homeric account, and his companions were initially thrown into prison; but they were later released all of a sudden, evidently through the miraculous intervention of their divine master, who proceeded to drive their captor mad. In his frenzy, Lycourgos killed his son Dryas with an axe in the delusion that he was pruning a vine branch, and had severed his limbs by the time that he returned to his senses. The land was then struck by a famine, and an oracle declared that it would recover its fertility

only if Lycourgos were put to death; so his people tied him up and exposed him on Mt Pangaion, where he was killed by wild horses through the will of Dionysos.¹⁶

Hyginus offers a somewhat different version, in which the nature of the god's revenge is linked once again to his concern with wine and the cultivation of vines. After driving Dionysos out of his kingdom and denying that he was a god, Lycourgos drank some wine (presumably after having become acquainted with it for the first time) and tried to rape his mother in his ensuing state of drunkenness; thinking that wine was clearly bad medicine, he responded by cutting down the vines, and then killed his wife and child – quite possibly in the delusion that he was chopping away at the vines, although that is not stated – after being struck mad by Dionysos; and the god finally concluded the matter by throwing him to his panthers on Mt Rhodope in Thrace.¹⁷ Hyginus also reports that Lycourgos was said to have cut off his own foot (probably in another account) in the belief that it was vine, and he refers elsewhere to another version of the myth in which Lycourgos killed himself while in the grip of his madness.¹⁸ In a chorus from Euripides' *Antigone* it is suggested, on the other hand, that he was merely imprisoned in a cave until his madness subsided.¹⁹

Another ancient myth set during the earlier years of Dionysos, told how he exacted revenge on some sailors who tried to mistreat him. As first recounted in the *Homeric Hymn (7) to Dionysos*, the story runs as follows. Some pirates caught sight of the god when

he appeared by the shore of the barren sea, in the likeness of a young man in the first flower of his youth; beautiful were the dark locks of hair that waved about him, and on his sturdy shoulders he wore a purple cloak²⁰

and they promptly seized him and hauled him on to their ship, imagining that he was a young man of royal birth who would fetch a valuable ransom. They were not deterred, even though the bonds fell off of their own accord when they tried to tie him up, and the youth merely smiled, and the helmsman warned them accordingly that he must surely be a god.²¹ When they sailed out to sea with him, strange things began to happen. First of all, fragrant wine streamed through the ship and a divine smell rose up from it; and then a vine, with many clusters of grapes hanging down, spread along the top of the sail, and an ivy plant twined around the mast, and garlands appeared on the rowlocks; and finally, and most fearsomely, the god turned himself into a lion and caused a huge shaggy bear to appear on the ship. The sailors fled to the stern in terror, and when the captain was then seized by the lion, they jumped overboard into the sea, where they were turned into dolphins. The helmsman alone survived because he was held back by the god, who now revealed his identity to him.²² Ovid, who recounts the same story with many variations of detail, names the helmsman as a certain Acoetes (Acoites in Greek form) from Maeonia (Lydia), and reports that he became an enthusiastic member of the god's retinue thereafter²³ (Figure 8.1).



Figure 8.1. Dionysos transforms the mast of a ship into a vine, and the sailors into dolphins. Attic cup by Exekias, c. 530 BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München, Germany.

Although the Homeric hymn does not mention where the pirates found Dionysos, or where they were planning to take him, it is stated in subsequent accounts that he asked the sailors to take him to Naxos (a wine-growing island, which was a notable centre of the cult of Dionysos), but they planned to sell him in Asia instead.²⁴ The pirates are described in the hymn as Tyrsenians, these presumably being a non-Hellenic people who lived somewhere in the Aegean area, but they later came to be identified as Tyrrhenians (i.e. Etruscans) who came from far away in Italy. Dionysos was picked up at the island of Icaria in the eastern Aegean according to Apollodorus, or on Chios according to Ovid. The miracles are varied or elaborated at will in such later accounts, with Apollodorus suggesting, for instance, that Dionysos turned the mast and the oars of the ship into snakes, and filled the vessel with ivy and the sound of flutes.²⁵ In a version recorded by Hyginus, the sailors were so struck by the youthful beauty of Dionysos that they wanted to rape him, but were initially restrained by the steersman Acoites, who suffered a beating as a result. Dionysos, realized, however, that their intentions remained unaltered, and worked his

customary miracles, turning the oars of the ship into thyrsos (his cultic emblem, see p. 172), the sails into vine-leaves, and the ropes into ivy, and causing lions and panthers to leap on to the deck. The sailors then jumped into the sea in terror, with the usual consequences.²⁶ Or in a version from the astronomical literature, in which Dionysos was still a child at the time, the Tyrrhenians were charged to take him and his companions to Naxos so that he could be entrusted to some Naxian nymphs who were to be his nurses, but they turned the ship on another course in the hope of profit (evidently with the intention of selling him and his companions into slavery). Catching wind of their intentions, Dionysos told his companions to raise a song together, and the Tyrrhenians began to dance around under the enchantment of these unfamiliar sounds, until they finally leapt unwittingly into the sea, where they were transformed into dolphins as usual; and the young god commemorated the episode by placing an image of a dolphin in the sky as the constellation Delphinus.²⁷ This would also explain why dolphins are fond of music, a belief reflected in the legend of Arion and the dolphin (see p. 573).

To return to the early wanderings of Dionysos, Apollodorus was following an early tradition in stating that he wandered far abroad after having been driven mad by Hera. An early epic called the *Europeia* already presented him as having wandered all around the world in those circumstances, and as having visited Phrygia, where Rhea (here identified with Cybele) purified him from his madness and instructed him in her rites.²⁸ Since the ecstatic rites of Cybele bore a resemblance to those of Dionysos, it was suggested that she had initiated him in this way in her homeland in Asia Minor, and Pindar accordingly presents the rites of the two deities as being interconnected, as does Euripides in the *Bacchae*.²⁹ Apollodorus states that Dionysos travelled onwards to India after his encounter with Lycourgos, and set up pillars at the eastern bounds of the earth,³⁰ comparable to those that were set up in the far west by Heracles (see p. 251). This aspect of the god's mythology was developed greatly in the later tradition, in which he came to be presented as having led an army to India, often in conjunction with Heracles, and as having made extensive conquests in the east, which could be compared to those of Alexander.

Myths in which Dionysos exacts terrible vengeance on those who reject him and his rites

We now come to the main body of opposition myths in which the adult Dionysos exacts revenge against rulers, or members of royal families, who deny his divinity and reject his rites when he first introduces them into their land. The most famous of these myths is set in his mother's home city of Thebes, and forms the subject of what is perhaps Euripides' finest surviving tragedy, the *Bacchae*. He visited Thebes in anger because his mother's sisters, Agave, Ino, and Autonoe, had denied that he was truly a son of Zeus, alleging that Semele had invented the story to conceal a love affair with a mortal, and that Zeus had struck her dead to punish her for lying.³¹ On his arrival, Dionysos manifested his powers by driving the three sisters mad, along with the other women of the city, and causing all of them to roam over Mt Cithairon as Bacchantes. Thebes was now under the rule of PENTHEUS, who was a grandson of

the city's founder, Cadmos, through his mother Agave. Being convinced that the new god was an impostor, Pentheus strongly disapproved of his rites, and so ordered his guards to arrest the stranger and anyone who engaged in the rites, paying no heed to the warnings of the seer Teiresias, or of Cadmos (who was still living at the Theban court in his old age). When his guards brought in Dionysos, who was pretending for the present to be no more than a priest of the god, Pentheus cross-examined him, and ordered that he should be imprisoned in the stables of the palace.³² But he escaped with ease, provoked an earthquake as a demonstration of his powers, and then appeared once again in front of his supposed captor. Impressed and yet still hostile, Pentheus allowed his extraordinary visitor to persuade him to disguise himself as a woman and to set off for the mountain to see with his own eyes what the followers of Dionysos were doing.³³ As he was spying on the women from high up in a pine tree, Dionysos incited them to attack him, and they surrounded the tree, pushed it over, and tore him to pieces. His mother Agave, who took a leading part in the assault, ran back to the palace with his severed head in the delusion that he had been a mountain lion.³⁴ Not until later, when her frenzy subsided, did she realize what she had done. The play ends as she and her sisters depart into exile at the order of Dionysos, whose revenge is now complete.³⁵

In another Boeotian tale of this kind, the MINYADES, the three daughters of Minyas, king of Orchomenos (see p. 557), also suffered a grim punishment for holding out against the new cult. Their fate is first described in a transformation myth ascribed to the Hellenistic poet Nicander. When the other women of the city left their homes to roam the mountains as Bacchantes, the three industrious princesses, who are named here as Leucippe, Arsippe, and Alcathe, strongly criticized them for doing so, and preferred to sit at home at their looms. Although Dionysos himself appeared to them in the guise of a young girl to urge them not to neglect his rites and mysteries, they spurned the advice, and he responded by changing into a bull, a lion, and then a leopard, and by causing milk and nectar to drip down from the frames of their looms. Overcome by terror at the sight of these prodigies, the three girls cast lots to see who should offer sacrifice to the god; and when the lot fell on Leucippe, the three of them joined together to tear her young son Hippasos to pieces. They then ran out to join the Bacchantes on the mountainside, where Hermes touched them with his wand to transform them into a bat and two different forms of owl, all of them creatures that avoid the light of day.³⁶ Or in another version, in which Dionysos offered them no direct warning, the god caused ivy and vines to envelop their looms, and snakes to appear in their wool-baskets, and wine and milk to drip from the ceiling. When he then proceeded to send them mad, they tore the son of Leucippe to pieces as though he were a young fawn, and rushed off to join the other women who had been under the god's power from the beginning; but the women chased them away because they were polluted by their crime, and they were transformed into a crow, a bat, and an owl.³⁷ Ovid alters the story significantly, transferring the sisters to Thebes, omitting the rending of Hippasos, and having them transformed into bats inside the house.³⁸

There were also other myths set in the Argolid in which Dionysos was said to have afflicted women of the land with madness, either the women in general, or else

just the three daughters of Proitos, king of Tiryns. The tradition is rather complicated in this case, however, since the daughters of Proitos were also said to have suffered their madness because they had offended Hera, and it would seem that two tales of separate origin, one relating to the princesses and the other to the Argive women in general, came to be confused and also combined. It seems likely that only the more general outbreak was originally associated with Dionysos, who was probably said to have driven the women mad for the usual reason, because his rites had been rejected; see further on p. 224. For a strange local legend in which Dionysos attacked Argos, in the time of Perseus, with an army of women from the Greek islands, see p. 229; Ovid mentions in passing that Acrisios, the grandfather of Perseus, once shut the god out of his city of Argos and suffered as a consequence.³⁹

A lesser tale that is perhaps worth recording is the cultic legend that was offered to explain the origin of the cult of Dionysos Melanaigis (of the black goat-skin) at Eleutherai on the borders of Attica and Boeotia. When the daughters of Eleuther, the eponymous founder of the town, were granted a vision of Dionysos in a black goat-skin, they greeted it with scorn, arousing such anger in the god that he drove them mad. At the order of an oracle, their father then founded the above-mentioned cult so as to appease the god and bring an end to their madness.⁴⁰

Dionysos was also said to have punished various individuals who ceased to honour him. According to one tradition, Orpheus died in much the same way as Pentheus, because Dionysos caused him to be torn apart by Bacchantes for neglecting his cult in favour of that of Helios (see further on p. 566); and it was said that Dionysos caused Telephos to trip over a vine branch while he was fleeing from Achilles, and so suffer a grievous wound (see p. 462), because he had failed to pay him due honour.⁴¹

In the preceding myths that tell of the coming of Dionysos, people are regularly sent mad by the god, and some are even torn to pieces by women under his influence. The god himself was commonly imagined as roaming at the head of a riotous band of followers, some semi-divine, Satyrs, Seilenoi, and nymphs, and some human, above all the women who were known as Maenads (Mainades, literally 'mad-women'), Bacchantes (Bakchai in Greek, Bacchae in Latin), or Thuiades (i.e. women possessed, inspired). These women were also known as Bassarides, probably meaning 'wearers of fox-skins' after one form of their ritual costume, another being the skin of a fawn. They would regularly perform strange miracles, so it was claimed, making fountains of milk or wine spring up from the ground; they were madly strong, able to tear goats, bulls, and human beings to pieces with their bare hands; fire would not burn them, nor would weapons cause them any harm; and in spite of the violence that they would sometimes show towards animals, they had a deep sympathy for them, often suckling kids and fawns for instance. All of this, extravagant though it may sound, is nothing other than an idealized picture of the enthusiastic ritual of the god. His worshippers sought, by ecstatic dancing, and perhaps also the use of wine, to become possessed by their god; they would then then be called Bacchantes after one of his many names. Tales in which they rend and devour an animal victim also had some basis in fact; these wild sacrifices followed from the desire that worshippers had to assimilate themselves to the god himself,

who was sometimes conceived as human in form, and sometimes as bestial, his most common manifestations being the bull and the goat, although he often appears as a serpent. He was in fact a god of the fertility of nature; and even if he tended to become a wine-god and god of ecstasy principally, he was never restricted to that sphere. The nature-spirits who belonged to his retinue will be discussed along with the nymphs in the next chapter (see p. 197). Although it is certainly possible that the rites of Dionysos may have met with real opposition here and there, it would be unwise to interpret the opposition myths in any simple historical sense; they express something essential about his permanent nature as a god whose epiphany subverts the norms of everyday morality and civic society.

The myth of Icarios and Erigone

Only a single legend of any real note, the Attic tale of Icarios, is recorded in connection with Dionysos' peaceful activities in spreading his gift of wine, and even here his visit has unfortunate consequences for those who become directly or indirectly involved, as a result of the equivocal nature of wine as an intoxicating drink. The only other legend of the kind that is worth mentioning is that of Oineus ('Wine-man'), king of Calydon, who received a vine from the god and instruction in its cultivation, as a reward for his perhaps over-generous hospitality, see further on p. 383.

ICARIOS was a humble farmer who lived in the countryside outside Athens, along with his unmarried daughter ERIGONE, during the reign of Pandion, an early king of the land (see p. 322). He received a visit one day from Dionysos, who gave him a vine cutting and instructed him in the art of wine making. After growing some vines from the cutting and preparing the first vintage of wine, Icarios loaded some wineskins on to a cart and set off to spread the gift of Dionysos to the people of Attica; or in a simpler version of the story, the god simply gave him some wine and he set off with it immediately.⁴² On reaching Marathon in the north-east of the province (or Hymettos to the south of Athens), Icarios distributed some wine to the local peasants, who were delighted with it at first, and drank it down in large amounts without thinking to add any water. When they became intoxicated, however, they thought that Icarios had poisoned them or put a spell on them, and clubbed him to death; or when some of them fell to the ground in a drunken stupor, their companions thought that they had been poisoned and responded by killing Icarios. They threw his body into a ditch afterwards, or buried it under a tree. Now it happened that Icarios had been accompanied by the family dog, Maira by name, which now rushed home in distress, howling in such a way that Erigone suspected the worst; and the dog then grasped her dress with its teeth and led her to the body. At the sight of it, she was so grief-stricken that she hanged herself on the tree that stood above his burial place; and the dog died soon afterwards in its turn, hurling itself into a well in its grief, or dying of starvation while guarding Erigone's body.⁴³

Dionysos was naturally enraged by what had happened, and responded in familiar fashion, by driving the girls of Attica mad, so that they proceeded to hang themselves just as Erigone had done. Some said that Erigone had prayed before her

death that the daughters of the Athenians should perish just as she had until the murderers were punished. It is also stated in some accounts that Athens was struck by a plague, either as the sole disaster or in addition to the epidemic of suicides. When the Athenians consulted the Delphic oracle, they were told that they would find relief from their trouble if they captured and killed the murderers of Icaros, and if they founded a new festival, the Aiora (Feast of Swings), in honour of Erigone.⁴⁴ In the course of this women's festival, a song would be sung to Erigone under the title of Aletis (the Wanderer, ostensibly because she had wandered in search of her father), and girls would be swung from the branches of trees on swings with wooden boards. It hardly needs saying that the rites would have been older than the myth that was devised to explain them; swinging rituals of this kind were by no means peculiar to the Aiora.

It was said that Zeus (or Dionysos) felt such pity at the fate of Icaros, Erigone, and the dog that he represented them among the stars⁴⁵ as the constellations Bootes (the Oxherd), Virgo (the Virgin) and Canis Major (the Large Dog). Or else the dog Maira was turned into the dog-star Sirius (Seirios in Greek), which was thought to bring the heat of the dog-days of summer because the hottest time of the year began after its early rising. In a further story that came to be attached to the myth of Icaros, his murderers were said to have fled to Ceos, an island lying to the south-east of Attica. To punish the Ceans for sheltering them, the dog Maira, in his new form as the dog-star, scorched the land with his heat, causing famine and disease. The island was then under the rule of Aristaios, son of Apollo, who had settled there after the tragic death of his son Actaion (see pp. 335–6), and he sought the advice of his father's oracle, which instructed him to offer sacrifices to expiate for the death of Icaros, and to pray to Zeus to send cooling winds to moderate the heat of the star. So he founded the cult of Zeus Icmaios ('of moisture') on Ceos together with the annual rites that supposedly elicited the Etesian winds, cooling northerly winds that blew in the Aegean for some forty days after the rising of the dog-star.⁴⁶

The wife and loves of Dionysos

Dionysos' conduct in the amorous sphere is rather exceptional for an Olympian god; he took a mortal, ARIADNE, as his consort, and had little or no interest in passing dalliances. Ariadne was a daughter of Minos, king of Crete, and Dionysos was sometimes said to have married her on Crete, but more often on Naxos after she had sailed away with Theseus after advising him how to escape from the labyrinth; in the latter case, Theseus either abandoned her on Naxos, or was instructed by Athena to leave her behind because Dionysos wanted to marry her, see further on pp. 296–7. The resulting marriage is mentioned in the *Theogony*, which states that Zeus made her immortal and un-ageing on Dionysos' behalf;⁴⁷ but although one might have supposed that immortality would be a precondition for any marriage between a god and a mortal, it is quite often assumed in the later literature that Dionysos eventually became separated from his wife through her death, and Polygnotos already placed her among the dead in his great painting of the Underworld (fifth century BC).⁴⁸ In astral mythology, Dionysos is said to have commemorated her after her death by

placing her crown in the sky as the constellation of the Northern Crown (Corona Borealis), see p. 296. Her grave could be seen in Argos. Divine honours were paid to her in some places, and she had presumably originated as a Cretan goddess.

No children are mentioned for Dionysos and Ariadne in the *Theogony*, or indeed in any early source. Various children, all relatively insignificant, are credited to them in the later tradition, including Oinopion ('Wine-face'), a mythical king of Chios who is best remembered for his encounter with Orion (see p. 561). Since Chios was noted for its wines and vineyards, it could be explained that the Chians had first learned the art of wine making from this son of Dionysos who had ruled them in the very earliest times. Among the other children of the marriage, we find such figures as Thoas, who was king of Lemnos when the Argonauts arrived there (see p. 400), and Staphylos ('Grape-bunch'), who was the father of Rhoio and grandfather of Anios, the priest-king of Delos who was visited by the Greeks during their voyage to Troy (see p. 461).⁴⁹

There are only a few minor tales that tell of other liaisons, and none that involve sexual violence (except in the very late Dionysian epic of Nonnos, in which he is said to have raped the nymph Nicaia and Aura, a companion of Artemis, while they were asleep). Women play a major part in his myths, of course, but generally in other roles, as his nurses and companions, or as participants in his rites or opponents of his cult. Some said that he seduced Althaia with the tacit consent of her husband, Oineus, king of Calydon, and so became the father of Heracles' second wife Deianeira; see further on p. 383. According to Ovid, he seduced Erigone while introducing wine to Attica, winning her favour by offering her a bunch of grapes, but this was plainly not an original feature of her legend. Priapos was a child of Dionysos and Aphrodite according to local tradition in the region of the Hellespont, which was the main centre of that god's cult (see pp. 204–5). As for Ampelos, a youth who is mentioned by Ovid and Nonnus as having attracted the love of Dionysos, he is no more than a personification of the vine (*ampelos*). According to the former author, Dionysos presented him with a vine, which was trailed over an elm-tree, and when the youth fell to his death one day as he was culling some grapes from it, the god transferred him to the sky as the star Vindemiator (the Vintager, in the constellation Virgo), whose early rising marked the start of the grape harvest. Or else Dionysos transformed him into a vine after he fell from a bull.⁵⁰

In earlier artistic representations, until the second half of the fifth century BC, Dionysos is portrayed as a mature bearded man dressed in long robes. Vase-paintings often show him wreathed in ivy or vine, and holding a cup (*kantharos*) or drinking horn in his hand. He may wear a panther skin or deer skin. From the latter part of the fifth century onwards, he is usually portrayed as a youthful figure, without a beard, who is lightly dressed if at all. His special emblem, which may be carried by himself or by his attendants or worshippers, is the *thyrsos*, a staff that is tipped with an ornament resembling a pine cone, and often entwined with ivy or vine. His cultic hymn is the dithyramb (*dithyrambos*, probably a word of foreign origin).

Hermes, the divine messenger and trickster

HERMES was borne to Zeus by his Arcadian mistress MAIA, who was normally regarded as a mortal woman as one of the seven daughters of Atlas (see p. 440), but would originally have been a nymph, as she is still described as being in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. She lived in a remote cave on Mt Cyllene in north-eastern Arcadia, where Zeus used to visit in secret at night.⁵¹ The legend of the resulting birth of Hermes, and of his precocious exploits, is recounted at length in the Homeric hymn, which handles the subject with the good-natured humour that seems appropriate to it.

After having been born at dawn, so the hymn tells us, Hermes was playing music on the lyre at midday, and stole the cattle of Apollo on that same evening.⁵² He jumped out of his cot almost as soon as he was born and walked out of his mother's cave; and on encountering a tortoise just outside, he was struck by a sudden inspiration and took it into the cave to convert it into a musical instrument. After killing it and scooping the flesh out of its shell, he inserted a pair of horns into the leg-holes at one end, fitted a crosspiece between the horns, and stretched seven strings of sheep-gut back over the shell to create the first lyre; and he then accompanied himself on it as he sang an improvised song, telling the tale of the love of Zeus and Maia and of his own begetting. Once that had been accomplished, he returned to his main purpose and set off to steal the cattle of Apollo.⁵³

Making his way to Pieria, far to the north in Macedonia, quite some walk for a new-born infant, he separated fifty cows from a herd belonging to Apollo and drove them away, making them walk backwards to confuse anyone who might come in search them. He walked in the usual way for his own part, but concealed his tracks by wearing some improvised sandals woven from twigs of myrtle and tamarisk.⁵⁴ Later authors suggest that he disguised the trail of the cattle by tying branches to their tails to act as brushes, or by fixing little boots over their hooves.⁵⁵ He hurried south with the cattle through Thessaly and Central Greece, and then back across the Isthmus to the Peloponnese. When an old man, who was tending his vineyard, happened to see him on the way at Onchestos in Boeotia, the young god warned him that he would be well-advised to keep quiet about the matter.⁵⁶ On reaching the river Alpheios in the western Peloponnese on the same night, Hermes called a halt and kindled a fire, inventing fire-sticks for the purpose; and he then slaughtered two of the cattle and divided their flesh into twelve portions to offer them in sacrifice to the Twelve Gods. As dawn was breaking, he finally returned to his mother's cave at Cyllene, slipping in through the keyhole, and tucked himself up in his cradle, the very picture of baby innocence.⁵⁷

Although Maia was not deceived and did her best to scold him, he retorted that he merely wanted what was due to him as a divine son of Zeus, and would steal it as best he may if it were not granted to him.⁵⁸ Apollo arrived at the cave in a great fury on the next day, having been put on the track by the old man at Onchestos, and having recognized the identity of the thief through an omen from a bird.⁵⁹ Brushing aside the bland assurances of Hermes, who claimed that he was too young even to know what cattle were let alone to steal them, Apollo hauled him off to Zeus to answer for his crime. After listening to a speech of consummate impudence from the infant god, who swore that had never done anything wrong and was incapable of

telling a lie, Zeus laughed at his effrontery and ordered him to guide Apollo to the stolen cattle forthwith.⁶⁰ So he took Apollo to the cave where they were hidden, in the region of Triphylian Pylos, and soon mollified him by singing a song to the accompaniment of the wonderful music of his lyre. Apollo was so entranced by the sound of the newly invented instrument that he agreed to surrender his cattle in exchange for it; and after returning the cattle to their proper pastures, the two gods went up to Olympos together.⁶¹ To console himself for the loss of his lyre, Hermes invented a new and humbler instrument for himself, the shepherd's pipes.

After demanding that Hermes should swear never to steal from him again, Apollo swore to become his dearest friend and presented him with a three-branched golden staff (possibly, though not necessarily, to be identified with the caduceus of Hermes). Although Hermes also wanted to be taught the art of prophecy, Apollo explained that the highest forms of the art were reserved for himself alone, and recommended that he should consult three virgins called the Thriai who would be able to instruct him in a subordinate form of divination, evidently the use of *thriai* or divining pebbles. Zeus ordered for his part that Hermes should have dominion over trade, beasts, and flocks, and be appointed his messenger to Hades.⁶² Since the Thriai, who lived under Mt Parnassos, are described in the hymn as winged sisters with meal-besprinkled heads who flew hither and thither, feeding on honeycomb, and were inspired to speak the truth through the eating of honey, it seems that they must have been imagined as being at least partly bee-like in form.⁶³

The early lyric poet Alcaeus offered an account of the juvenile exploits of Hermes, but little is recorded of it beyond the fact that Hermes contrived to steal the quiver of Apollo while that god was trying to scare him into returning the stolen cattle.⁶⁴ A substantial portion of Sophocles' *Trackers* (*Ichneutai*), a Satyr-play based on the same body of legend, has been recovered from papyri; this is a burlesque in which Seilenos leads a chorus of Satyrs in pursuit of the infant cattle-thief on Apollo's behalf. Apollodorus' later summary of the young god's adventures conflicts with the Homeric hymn in certain details. Hermes' invention of the lyre is delayed, for instance, until after his theft of the cattle, and he is thus able to use gut from the two slaughtered cattle to make the strings. In this account, Apollo also covets Hermes' second musical invention, the shepherd's pipes, and offers him the golden staff in exchange for them; but Hermes demands to receive the art of divination in addition, and Apollo himself teaches him the use of divining pebbles for that reason.⁶⁵

The old man who saw Hermes passing with the stolen cattle was sometimes said to have been a certain BATTOS (Blabberer), who was turned to stone as a punishment for his chattering, but in that case he was associated with Arcadia rather than with Boeotia as in the hymn. The story is recounted as follows by Antoninus Liberalis, whose main source was probably the Hellenistic poet Nicander (although he also cites other authors including the Hesiodic *Catalogue*). Hermes saw an opportunity for the theft because Apollo had fallen in love with Hymenaios (see p. 206, here described as a son of Magnes, the eponym of the Thessalian region of Magnesia), and was constantly hanging around his father's house. So he began by drugging Apollo's watchdogs, and then drove away a hundred of his oxen along with twelve heifers and a bull, tying branches to the tails of each to brush away their

tracks. As he was passing through Arcadia, however, after arriving back in the Peloponnese, this Battos, who lived on a mountain top, saw that he was driving stolen cattle, and demanded a reward for his silence. Although Battos swore to keep his side of the bargain, Hermes mistrusted him and came back in disguise to test him as soon as he had hidden the cattle, and Battos duly betrayed the secret in return for a woollen cloak. To punish his perfidy, the god then turned him to stone with a touch of his wand. This story provides an explanation for the name of some crags in Arcadia known as the *Battou Skopiai* (the peaks or lookout points of Battos).⁶⁶ Ovid offers a comparable story, stating that Battos was an old man who tended the mares of Neleus (the king of Pylos in Messenia, see p. 451). After receiving a cow from Hermes as the price for his silence, Battos betrayed the secret when the god returned in disguise and bribed him to talk by promising him a bull and a cow. In this case, Hermes turned him to flint.⁶⁷

The name and nature of Hermes

Something has already been indicated about the character and functions of Hermes in the tales that were told about his early exploits. He was an ancient god whose name, which already appears on Linear B tablets, was almost certainly derived from the Greek word *herma*, meaning a cairn or heap of stones. Such cairns were a common sight by the Greek wayside, where they served as landmarks and boundary-markers; and as in the popular lore of other regions and ages, they became a focus for all kinds of superstitions. It would seem, then, that Hermes originated as a relatively humble being, as ‘he of the stone-heap’, the power that was supposed to reside in cairns. An aetiological myth was devised to account for this association, doubtless at a fairly late period: when he was brought to trial by the gods for having killed Argos Panoptes (see p. 213), they caused a heap of stones to pile up around him as they all cast their voting pebbles to acquit him.⁶⁸ From the late archaic period onwards, boundary-markers were often erected in the form of a rectangular stone pillar with a bearded head on the top and a phallus on the side, usually erect; such an object, which is called a *herm* in English (from Latin *herma*), was known to the Greeks as a *Hermes*. Athens was particularly noted for the many *herms* that could be seen in its streets and squares.

When imagined in fully anthropomorphic form, Hermes was pictured above all as a herald and wayfarer. In this capacity, he was characteristically represented as wearing the broad-brimmed felt hat (*petasos*) that Greek travellers would wear to keep the sun out of their eyes, and carrying a herald’s staff (*kerykeion*, or *caduceus* in Latin). He was, of course, far swifter and less earthbound than any human traveller, as is indicated in many images through his winged sandals or hat. His most important role by far in legend was to act as a messenger for the gods, and for Zeus in particular. He is sometimes merely dispatched to communicate the will of Zeus, as when he speeds above the waves like a bird to the remote island of Calypso to order her to release Odysseus (see p. 510); or he may take direct action to put the will of Zeus or of the gods into effect, as when he guides Priam to the Greek camp at night to seek the return of Hector’s body, putting the guards to sleep as the two of them

approach Achilles' hut.⁶⁹ The whole episode is very characteristic of Hermes, who tends to be discreet or even furtive in his approach and actions but is almost always benevolent to mortals. He performed many other missions for Zeus and the other gods, as we will see in connection with heroic myth, and acted as a special protector to Perseus (see pp. 226–7) and also to Heracles during that hero's incursion into the Underworld. As would be expected of a herald, he rarely took the lead in any course of action, and he did not hold a particularly high position in the Olympian family, being viewed rather as the younger son who ran errands for the rest. Mortal heralds could naturally call on his protection, and he also presided over the arts that are required for effective communication, such as oratory and persuasive speech or interpretation in dealing with foreigners. An interpreter was known as a *hermeneus* accordingly (hence the modern term of hermeneutics) (Figure 8.2).



Figure 8.2. A herms-maker. Red-figure cup, c. 510 BC. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

In accordance with his original nature as the spirit of the stone-pile, most of the

functions of Hermes were related in one way or another to the wayside and wayfaring and to boundaries and the transgression of boundaries. Under such titles as Hodios (God of the Road) and Hegemenos or Agetor (Leader, Guide), he was the god of the road and the protector of all who travelled on it, whether openly on legitimate business or more covertly for nefarious purposes. If he was the patron god of merchants and traders, he was also the patron of tricksters and thieves, and a conferrer of fortune whether honestly or dishonestly gained. Brigandage and cattle-raiding, especially where undetected, were quite respectable sources of fortune in early days, and Hermes was supposed to have begun his career by rustling the cattle of Apollo. He was a god of luck, moreover, in the widest sense, and windfalls and strokes of good fortune of every kind lay within his gift. A lucky find or treasure trove was known accordingly as a *hermaion* or *hermaia dosis* (i.e. gift of Hermes). Like Apollo Nomios, he was also a god whose influence extended over the traditional ancient forms of wealth, namely flocks and herds and their increase. In this connection in particular, he had a special association with Arcadia. He was concerned likewise with human fertility, and one of his oldest cultic emblems was the phallus, which always remained a prominent feature of his cult.

As a god who was concerned with boundaries and their transgression, he was able to cross over and so help others to cross over the most formidable boundary of all, that which separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. He was exceptional in this respect among the Olympian deities, who generally avoided all contact with death and the dead; no other god passed over this frontier, apart from Persephone of course (and perhaps one or two others in exceptional circumstances). In classical and later times at least, it was supposed that one of his most important functions was to serve as the *psychopompos* or 'conductor of souls' who guided the shades of the newly dead to their future home in the sunless realm. As was noted on pp. 102–3 in connection with the mythology of the Underworld, it seems likely that this was not a very ancient conception, and that this duty was first assigned to him well after the time of Homer and Hesiod (even if he is once presented as performing it in the present text of the *Odyssey*, see p. 98). Associated though he may have come to be with death and the journey below, he was never pictured as a grim or intimidating god, as in the case of Hades and Thanatos, but always as courteous and considerate, as was proper for a herald.

In his earlier images from archaic art, Hermes was typically represented as a mature figure with a beard, as continued to be the case when his head was portrayed on herms. He appears with great frequency in Attic vase-paintings, whether as a leading figure in exploits of his own or as an attendant figure, usually clad in the traveller's garb described above. From the latter part of the fifth century BC onwards, his artistic type changes in accordance with developments in sculpture, and he comes to be represented as a beardless and naked youth (*ephēbos*), not unlike his half-brother Apollo, but younger and less muscular. He is shown in that way in the famous statue in the museum at Olympia, which may be the only surviving work of Praxiteles (born c. 390 BC). Such images of him were very often set up in the gymnasia and wrestling schools (*palaistrai*), and he came increasingly to be regarded as a special patron of adolescent youths and their exercises. Hermes could also be

portrayed in rustic guise as Criophoros (the Ram-bearer), carrying a ram in his arm or on his shoulders.

Although Hermes engaged in love affairs with some mortal women, notably Philonis (see p. 554) and Herse (see p. 320), and was said to have fathered various children by such liaisons, he never married, nor is he linked to any goddess in early myth. Pan was commonly classed as a son of his (see p. 199–200), as is understandable since he resembled Pan in some respects as a pastoral god who had special connections with Arcadia; and it was doubtless inevitable that it should have come to be suggested in the late tradition that Hermepahroditos was a son who was borne to him by Aphrodite (see p. 206). The Italians identified Hermes with Mercurius (Mercury), whose name indicates in Latin that he was a god of merchants and their wares; Mercurius was often represented with similar attributes to those of Hermes, and apparently originated as a Roman offshoot of the Greek god.

Hephaistos, the divine blacksmith

As has already been mentioned, there were two conflicting traditions about the birth of HEPHAISTOS, who was a normal child of Zeus and Hera in the Homeric view,⁷⁰ but was also said to have been brought forth by Hera without prior intercourse with her husband, by way of a counter-miracle because she was angry with him for having brought Athena to birth from his head (see p. 70). The latter idea, which was probably a Hesiodic innovation, was more generally favoured.⁷¹ The most distinctive feature of Hephaistos is his lameness, which is wholly exceptional in a god, especially in one of such high birth. The main myth of his earlier life is connected with that, for it was said that Hera was so ashamed of his deformity that she wanted to hide him away, and threw him down from heaven into the sea. Hephaistos himself recounts the story in the *Iliad*, telling how he was rescued by the Oceanid nymph Eurynome and Nereid sea-nymph Thetis, who hid him away in their cave beneath the outer Ocean for nine full years. It was during this time that he seems to have first embarked on his career as a craftsman, for he repaid their kindness by fashioning all kinds of fine jewellery for them as the Ocean roared around outside.⁷² The story is also told from Hera's perspective in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, in which she refers to the shame that she felt at having brought forth a weak and cripple-footed child, and expresses anger towards Thetis for having rescued him. Thetis is pictured here as having looked after him with her Nereid sisters.⁷³

A further tale came to be attached to the myth of Hera's ejection of Hephaistos, and evidently at a quite early period, since it was recounted by the lyric poet Alcaeus (born late seventh century BC) and Pindar.⁷⁴ We have to rely mainly on later sources, however, for our knowledge of it. To avenge his mother's treatment of him, Hephaistos sent her the apparently wonderful gift of a golden throne, but it had invisible cords attached to it, which tied her fast when she sat down. Since none of the gods could release her from it apart from its maker, it was urgently necessary that he should be fetched back to Olympos, but this could be achieved neither by persuasion nor by force, until Dionysos, who was on good terms with him, got him drunk and hauled him away to Olympos while he was intoxicated.⁷⁵ In what is

apparently a surviving line from Alcaeus' poem about the matter, it is indicated that the war-god Ares had said that he could bring him back by force; but he had failed to do so, apparently because Hephaistos scared him away with burning torches.⁷⁶ He can be seen in vase-paintings riding back to Olympus on an ithyphallic ass in the company of nymphs and Seilenoi.

Hephaistos seems to have suffered the misfortune of being thrown down from Olympus more than once, since the *Iliad* refers to a second tale in which Zeus took such action, evidently at a later time, because he was angry with him for having come to the support of Hera. After having plunged through the air for a full day, he fell to the ground on the island of Lemnos at sunset in a state of exhaustion, but received good care from the Sintians (*Sinties*), as the inhabitants are called here. Although nothing is stated in the *Iliad* about the circumstances in which Hephaistos had tried to help his mother, Apollodorus says that it was when Zeus suspended her from Olympus for sending a storm against Heracles (see p. 262). Since that story is mentioned in the *Iliad*, and Zeus says in that connection that he will throw any god down from heaven if he catches him coming to her aid, it is quite possible that Homer would have expected his audience to draw that connection. Apollodorus adds, furthermore, that the fall was the cause of Hephaistos' deformity, since he was lamed in both legs by the fall; and although that is neither stated nor implied in the *Iliad*, in which Hephaistos is regarded as having been lame from birth, it is understandable that the Homeric story should have prompted the thought in later times.⁷⁷

Hephaistos has a non-Greek name, and he was likewise of non-Greek and probably Anatolian origin. Although he was little worshipped on the Greek mainland except at Athens, which was home to many craftsmen whose trade depended on the use of fire, his cult was of some importance in Asia Minor and the adjoining islands, and also the Greek colonies in the volcanic regions of Italy and Sicily. In Asia Minor, he was particularly associated with Lycia in the south-west, and above all the region of the Lycian Olympus, which was remarkable for the presence of large quantities of natural gas; he appears to have been the principal god of Phaselis, the main coastal city of that region. It has been suggested that he may have originated as a fire-god among the native peoples of Lycia, and that his cult may have spread from this original centre, not only to other areas of the mainland of Asia Minor, but also to adjacent islands, especially Lemnos, whose mountain, Moschylos, is volcanic though long extinct. The city of Hephaistias on the north coast of the island was named after Hephaistos, and he had a special association with the island from an early period, as shown in the Homeric legend in which he fell to earth there, after being thrown down from Olympus. As a deity who was associated with fire, he was pictured as a divine blacksmith from a very early period, and various places came to be identified as the site of his underground forge, wherever its presence could be inferred from extensive emissions of fire and smoke. When his cult was transferred to the volcanic regions of the west, the Aeolian (Lipari) islands near Sicily came to be connected with him, and also to some extent Sicily itself and southern Campania. He was universally familiar, of course, as a god of myth even in areas where he was not extensively honoured in cult. In Rome, Hephaistos was identified with Vulcanus

(Vulcan), but perhaps not altogether appropriately, since Hephaistos came to be regarded almost exclusively as a smith-god, whereas Volcanus was the god of destroying fire and had nothing to do with its productive applications.

As a limping god who toiled at a grimy craft, the Hephaistos of myth was not a figure of the highest dignity. Even in Homer, he is something of a figure of fun, whose clumsy activities arouse unquenchable laughter among the gods (hence the proverbial phrase ‘Homeric laughter’) as he puffs away while serving them at table.⁷⁸ His usual workshop in the early tradition was situated neither on Lemnos nor anywhere else on the earth below, but in his house of bronze on Olympos, where he fashioned marvellous objects of every kind,⁷⁹ some that were magical and some that were merely intricate and beautiful, ranging from the golden automata that helped him, as servants in his house, to armour of unparalleled splendour for the gods or specially favoured mortals. From the classical period onwards, his forge was imagined as being located at various places in the everyday world. It was sometimes placed on Lemnos, where the blinded Orion was supposed to have visited it and to have received assistance from its owner (see p. 561);⁸⁰ but since Lemnos had no active volcano, most authors preferred to imagine that the divine forge lay in the west, either under Mt Etna in Sicily⁸¹, or under a volcano in the Aeolian islands to the north,⁸² hence the flames and smoke that arose from them. In contrast to Homer, who presents Hephaistos as working on his own (with some help from his automata and a semi-automatic bellows), authors from Callimachus onwards provide him with assistants in the form of the Cyclopes, the primordial beings who had armed Zeus with his thunderbolt (see p. 24).⁸³ This furnished an attractive theme for poets and artists, who loved to portray Hephaistos in his underground forge with his soot-blackened workmen around him, endlessly busy with one task or another, preparing thunderbolts for Zeus perhaps, or arrows for Artemis, or arms for some favoured hero.

The creations of Hephaistos fall into three main classes. In the first place, he was a master architect who created splendid homes for himself and the other gods on Olympos.⁸⁴ Although imperishable divine buildings were pictured as being made of bronze in whole or part, the *Iliad* indicates that his skills extended to masonry too, by referring to porticoes of polished stone that he erected at the palace of Zeus.⁸⁵ He had an eye for detail, moreover, for he made tightly closing doors for Hera’s bedroom with a secret bolt, which could be opened by no other god.⁸⁶ Down on earth, he erected a bronze temple of Apollo at Delphi, which was supposed to have stood there before the first stone temple was erected by the legendary builders Trophonios and Agamedes (see p. 558).⁸⁷

In the second place, Hephaistos was a craftsman with superhuman capacities who could create automata that acted of their own accord. We are told in the *Iliad* that he was assisted in his house by maidens of gold who possessed understanding, speech, and strength; and he also made tripods that were fitted with ears and wheels, and could make their way to and from the gatherings of the gods at his command.⁸⁸ The *Odyssey* adds that he fashioned dogs of gold and silver to guard the palace of Alcinoo,⁸⁹ and later sources refer to further automata, such as Talos, a bronze giant who guarded the coast of Crete (see p. 410), and a golden dog that guarded a shrine

of Zeus on the island (see p. 419), and golden singing figures that stood on the pediment of the Delphian temple mentioned above.

And thirdly, Hephaistos made splendid arms and armour, and jewellery and other fine artefacts, which sometimes remained in the possession of the gods but are generally more important in myth if they entered the possession of mortals. The armour of Achilles (see p. 474), the breastplate of Diomedes, and the sceptre of Agamemnon (see p. 425) may be mentioned from the *Iliad*,⁹⁰ and the necklace of Harmonia (see p. 333), the crown of Ariadne (see p. 296), and the sword of Peleus (see p. 428) from later sources. In a looser sense, any strange or wonderful object that makes an appearance in heroic legend, from the underground house of Oinopion (see p. 562) to the bronze-hooved cattle of Aietes, could be described as ‘Hephaistos-made’ (*Hephaistoteuktos*). A particularly useful creation of Hephaistos was the golden cup that he made for the sun-god Helios, to carry him around the streams of Ocean from the place of his setting to that of his rising (see p. 42); in an early account by the lyric poet Mimnermus, this hollow golden bowl (or ‘bed’ as it is called here) is said to have been fitted with wings and presumably had some power of self-motion.⁹¹

Various myths, all recounted in other contexts, presented Hephaistos as putting his distinctive skills to good use in various ways. It was to him that Zeus assigned the task of creating the first woman, Pandora, whom he moulded from moistened clay (see p. 87), and he split the head of Zeus with an axe to ease the birth of Athena (see p. 155). In a famous story from the *Odyssey*, in which Aphrodite is regarded as being his wife, he catches her in adultery with Ares by laying a fine-woven net across his bed, and so exposes the two of them to ridicule, see further on p. 185. There is no indication otherwise in early literature or art that he was thought to be married to Aphrodite; the *Theogony* points to another union of opposites, stating that he was married to Aglaia, the youngest of the Graces, and the *Iliad* suggests similarly that he was married to Charis (Grace personified).⁹² For the story of his attempted rape of Athena, which resulted in the birth of Erichthonios, see p. 158. He was otherwise credited with few children, and only minor figures who were identified as such either because they were lame, as in the case of Periphetes, an early opponent of Theseus (see p. 293) and the Argonaut Palaimonios,⁹³ or because of their manual skills, as in the case of Ardalos, a legendary builder who raised a temple to the Muses at Troizen and was sometimes said to have invented the flute.⁹⁴

Aphrodite, the goddess of love

The one great goddess who remains to be considered is APHRODITE, who presided over sexual attraction and the pleasures of love (*ta Aphrodisia*), and all that is associated with them. In the standard account of her birth, as recounted by Hesiod, she grew from the foam (*aphros*) that gathered around the severed genitals of Ouranos (Sky) after they were thrown into the sea by his son Cronos (see p. 27). This would mean that she was born at an earlier stage than any other Olympian god. Homer offers a different account, however, which may well be of earlier origin, describing her as the daughter of Zeus and Dione (see pp. 74–5), and thus as an

Olympian god of the second generation like Apollo and Artemis.⁹⁵ As to her historical origin, it may be safely said that she owed a great deal, and probably almost all, to eastern influences. From the *Iliad* onwards, she is often called Cypris, 'Lady of Cyprus', where her cult was certainly very old and as certainly of non-Greek origin;⁹⁶ and she also had an ancient association with Cythera off the south-eastern corner of the Peloponnese, as is acknowledged by Hesiod, who states that she drifted past the island after her birth, hence her title of Cytheria, before stepping ashore on Cyprus, which was destined to be her main home. Her shrine on Cythera, which contained an armed wooden idol of the goddess, was thought to be the earliest in Greece; Herodotus regarded it as being of Phoenician foundation.⁹⁷ It is, in fact, more than likely that she was a goddess of Semitic origin, as an adaptation of the great Semitic love-goddess, who was known to the Phoenicians as Astarte and to the Babylonians as Ishtar. Aphrodite's title of Ourania, the Heavenly, corresponds to Astarte's as Queen of Heaven, and various aspects of her cult, such as the use of incense-altars and dove-sacrifices, and the occasional practice of temple-prostitution as at Corinth, can be related to cultic practices associated with Astarte/Ishtar.

Aphrodite was the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, and also of married love to some extent, although Hera tended to dominate in that area. She had marine associations as a goddess who was naturally associated with water and moisture, and was said to have risen up from the sea in the usual myth of her birth (hence her title of Anadyomene, 'she who rises up from the sea'); she was often shown with a shell as her attribute, or with a dolphin, and was widely honoured as a protector of sailors who could bring calm to the sea or victory in sea-battles. She had various titles in this connection, such as Pontia, Thalassia, and Einalia (all meaning 'of the sea') or Euploia (as a goddess who can ensure 'a good voyage'). Her martial aspect, which may seem more surprising, can be explained by a similar trait in her Semitic equivalent; she was worshipped as an armed war-goddess at Cythera and Sparta especially, and as Nikephoros, the Bringer of Victory, at Argos. Although the Greeks followed Hesiod in relating her name to the *aphros*, sea-foam, from which she had supposedly sprung, its true origin and meaning are wholly uncertain, and it seems likely that it was not of Indo-European origin.

Plato and Xenophon draw a sharp distinction between Aphrodite Ourania on the one hand, as the 'Heavenly' goddess who presides over the highest form of love that is directed primarily towards the soul of the beloved, and Aphrodite Pandemos (of all the people) on the other hand, as the goddess who concerns herself with vulgar or mercenary love that is purely carnal in nature.⁹⁸ This is a literary conceit of a moralistic character that deliberately reinterprets the meaning of these cultic titles. Aphrodite was no less a goddess of sexual desire under her title of Ourania, which was derived, as we have seen, from her Semitic counterpart, who was not noted for her high-mindedness; and far from bearing immoral connotations, Aphrodite's title of Pandemos represents her as a civic goddess whose worship unites the whole people. At Athens, Aphrodite Pandemos was a quiet and staid marriage-goddess, in whose worship nothing untoward seems to have taken place; according to local legend, Theseus founded the cult after he had united the people of Attica into a single state.⁹⁹ Plato's reinterpretation of these titles (if it was indeed his own) left its mark

on the subsequent tradition nonetheless. Theocritus, for instance, opposes Aphrodite Ourania to Aphrodite Pandemos in one of his epigrams; and Pausanias reports a Theban tradition, which claimed that Harmonia (the divine wife of the first king of the city, see p. 331) had given Aphrodite her title of Ourania in relation to love that was free from the lust of the body, and of Pandemos in relation to carnal love.¹⁰⁰ If exception is made for certain local exoticisms, such as the temple-prostitutes at Corinth, the public cult of Aphrodite in Greece was eminently respectable for the most part.

In 464 BC, a Corinthian athlete called Xenophon vowed to dedicate a hundred prostitutes to the service of Aphrodite in his native city if he won an Olympian victory. When the vow was due to be fulfilled after he won a double victory in the foot-race and pancration (all-in wrestling), Pindar was commissioned to write an ode to be sung in Aphrodite's temple, and responded with his customary panache by writing a poem that began,

Guest-loving girls, servants of Persuasion [Peitho, see p. 39] in wealthy Corinth, who burn the golden tears of fresh incense, often soaring upwards in your minds to Aphrodite, the heavenly mother of loves, she who has granted you to pluck without reproach, girls, on lovely couches the fruit of gentle beauty.¹⁰¹

Eros and other associates of Aphrodite

As the goddess of love, Aphrodite is regularly attended by EROS, the personification of amorous desire, who fulfils his purposes by inspiring love in gods and mortals alike. After initially presenting him as a primordial cosmogonic power (see p. 18), the *Theogony* later reports that he attended Aphrodite from the time of her birth, and that he accompanied her to Olympus when she ascended to join the other gods.¹⁰² In the subsequent literature, he is often tied to her even more closely, as being not merely her attendant but her son; the idea first appears in a fragment from Simonides, which describes him as being the merciless child whom she bore to Ares.¹⁰³ On this matter of his birth, however, all manner of conflicting suggestions were offered by the poets and inventors of cosmogonies. The early lyric poets have much to say about Eros and about the irresistible power that he exerts on his victims. Bitter-sweet, a loosener of limbs, he shakes the poet's heart like a wind descending on the mountain oaks; he is also a weaver of tales, an enchanter, who uses his magical arts to cast his victim into the nets of Aphrodite.¹⁰⁴ Euripides is the first author to suggest that he works this compulsion by means of his arrows.¹⁰⁵ In addition to being a god of the poets and cosmogonists, he was honoured quite extensively in cult. Some of his cults were certainly very old, notably that at Thespiiai, where he was represented by an aniconic stone image, which was doubtless of venerable antiquity.¹⁰⁶ His cult and images in the gymnasia reflect his concern with homosexual love, as awakened by the bodily attractions of young men and boys. In the Hellenistic period, as the idea of romantic love came increasingly to the fore in literature, Eros came to be imagined above all as a capricious and playful child-god; rather than being shown as a handsome young athlete, or as a young boy as in classical art, he was now generally shown as a pretty child, a little winged

archer who was ever ready to work mischief on gods or mortals with his arrows. This is the form in which he has usually been imagined since the Renaissance, as innocuous Cupid rather than the old Greek Eros.

Although Eros can quite often be seen fluttering around in seduction scenes or abduction scenes on Attic vases, he is seldom introduced into mythical narratives, appearing for the most part in later writings and in a subordinate role, as part of the divine machinery for making one person fall in love with another. In Apollonius' Hellenistic epic, for instance, Aphrodite approaches her naughty and disobedient son to ask him to cause Medeia to fall in love with Jason; and she wins his compliance by promising to give him a beautiful ball, all golden except where it was overlaid with a spiral of dark blue, a marvel that had been made for the infant Zeus by his nurse Adrasteia.¹⁰⁷ Or in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Apollo rebukes the child-god for presuming to employ his own favourite weapon, the bow, so annoying the boy that he pays Apollo back by shooting a sharp golden arrow into him to cause him to fall in love with the nymph Daphne (see pp. 148–9), and a blunt lead-tipped arrow into Daphne to cause her to take an aversion to her new admirer.¹⁰⁸

As a fairy tale with a considerable allegorical content, the story of Cupid (i.e. Eros) and Psyche (the soul personified) in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* stands apart from the ordinary mythology of Eros. It was probably based on a Hellenistic original. According to this tale, Psyche was a young princess who became so celebrated for her beauty that Aphrodite grew jealous and sent Cupid to wreak vengeance on her, telling him to make her fall in love with some utterly worthless man; but the plan went wrong because Cupid himself fell in love with the girl. Now Psyche was so extremely beautiful that no man dared to court her; and when her parents consulted an oracle of Apollo about the matter, they were told to expose her in bridal robes on a mountain, where some apparently fearsome bridegroom would come to claim her. When they did so, she was carried away by the wind to a deep valley, and found her way into a wondrously beautiful palace nearby. This turned out to be a magical palace where she was tended by invisible servants, and Cupid visited her there in her bedroom each night, and made love to her in the dark without revealing his identity. In the meantime, her two elder sisters had set out in search of her, and Cupid allowed them to see her, though against his better judgement, warning her to ignore them if they tried to persuade her to discover what he looked like. Such was their envy at her good fortune that they cast her into a panic by suggesting that her mysterious husband was an enormous snake who would finally swallow her alive. At their urging, she hid a knife and a lamp in her bedroom so as to kill him while he was asleep; but when she shone the lamp on him to do so, she saw that he was a winged youth of surpassing beauty and fell more in love with him than ever. All might have been well if some scalding oil from the lamp had not dripped on to his shoulder, causing him to wake with a start and then abandon her in anger at her disobedience. Overcome by regret and longing, the unfortunate Psyche, who was pregnant by now, roamed the world in search of him until she finally fell into the hands of Aphrodite, who forced her to undertake four seemingly impossible tasks. She was to separate a large heap of seeds and grains into its different components in a single day; but the ants of the neighbourhood took pity on her and she achieved

the task with their aid. She was to fetch some wool from a flock of homicidal sheep; but a reed was stirred by some divine wind to tell her to wait until they were asleep, and then collect the wool that had become snagged on the thorns of the surrounding plants. She was sent to fetch a jar of water from the sacred streams of the Styx; but the eagle of Zeus remembered a debt that he owed to Cupid (who had helped him to carry off Ganymedes) and fetched the water on her behalf. And finally, she was to fetch Persephone's beauty-casket from the Underworld. She succeeded once again, with some supernatural aid, but disaster struck when she allowed her curiosity to get the better of her and opened the casket, for she was immediately overcome by a death-like sleep. Cupid had recovered from his wound in the meantime, and had come to miss Psyche so greatly that he had flown off to find her. On his arrival, he shut the cloud of sleep back into the chest and awakened Psyche by pricking her with one of his arrows. He then sought the permission of Zeus to take her up to heaven, where she lived with him as his immortal wife, bearing him a child called Voluptas (Pleasure).¹⁰⁹

Two lesser figures who are mentioned as companions of Aphrodite (and sometimes of other gracious female deities such as the Charites and Horai) are HIMEROS and POTHOS, two personifications of amorous yearning. Hesiod states that Himeros – whose name means much the same as that of Eros – attended Aphrodite from her birth along with Eros, and that his house lay on Olympos close to those of the Muses and Charites.¹¹⁰ Pothos (Desire, Yearning) enters the literary record somewhat later, but then appears much more frequently. Aeschylus is the first author to refer to him unequivocally as a personified being, mentioning him together with Peitho (the personification of amatory persuasion) as a child and assistant of Aphrodite.¹¹¹ A purely decorative and allegorical being, he has no myths at all.

Eros had a counterpart or double in ANTEROS (Counter-love, Love Returned); the altar of Anteros near the Acropolis at Athens had the following tale attached to it. An Athenian boy called Meles spurned the love of a metic (resident alien) called Timagoras, and told him to jump off the Acropolis if he really wanted to prove his love. But when the despairing Timagoras took him at his word and actually did so, Meles felt such remorse that he threw himself down from the same spot. In commemoration, the metics set up the altar of Anteros.¹¹² Pausanias mentions that there was a relief at the youths' training ground at Elis that showed Anteros trying to wrest a palm branch from Eros.¹¹³

Aphrodite and Adonis

In considering the myths of Aphrodite herself, we will do well to begin with the most easterly stories, of which the best known is that of her love for ADONIS; for here we have, without a doubt, the familiar oriental tale of the Great Mother and her divine lover. The name Adonis is probably derived from the Semitic 'adon, lord, and he is quite often identified with Tammuz, as for instance in the vulgate of Ezekiel.¹¹⁴ Except in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, which described him as a son of Phoinix, son of Agenor (see p. 288),¹¹⁵ he was always said to have been born to the eastern princess Smyrna (or Myrrha in Latin) as the result of an incestuous union with her father,

who was an Assyrian or Cypriot king. According to the earliest known account by Panyasis, an epic poet of the fifth century BC, Smyrna refused to honour Aphrodite, who was so angry that she inspired her with a passion for her own father, Theias, king of the Assyrians; so the girl slipped into his bed under cover of darkness with the connivance of her nurse, and he slept with her for twelve nights in succession without realizing who she was. When he discovered what he had done, however, he was struck with horror and chased after her, sword in hand, and when she prayed to the gods to be removed from human sight, they responded by turning her into a myrrh tree (*smyrna* in Greek, but *myrrha* in Latin, hence her Latin name). After the normal period of gestation for a human child, the bark of the tree broke open and Adonis came to birth.¹¹⁶ In the version recorded by Antoninus, perhaps derived from Nicander, her father became curious about her identity when she became pregnant and so shone a light on her one night. In the shock of the moment, she gave birth to her child prematurely, and then prayed never to be seen again among the living or the dead, prompting Zeus to turn her into a myrrh tree, which weeps resinous tears each year.¹¹⁷ Adonis was usually said to have been born from the tree, however, as in the preceding version. In the lengthy narrative by Ovid, Myrrha, as she is called here in Latin, conceived her child to Cinyras, king of Cyprus (see p. 569), as was often said to have been the case in the late tradition. He discovered her identity by shining a light on her, as in the previous version, and she then took flight and wandered for nine months until she arrived at the land of the Sabataeans in Arabia, which was the main source of myrrh and frankincense in ancient times, and was thus a suitable location for her transformation. She was turned into a tree there when she prayed to be removed from among the living and the dead, and her child was born from it as in the usual tradition.¹¹⁸

When Aphrodite caught sight of the infant Adonis, she was so entranced by his beauty that she shut him up in a chest to conceal him from the other gods, and entrusted him to Persephone; but Persephone was equally impressed by his beauty and wanted to keep him for herself. The dispute was referred to Zeus, who decided that Adonis should spend a third of each year with each goddess and the rest of the year by himself. Since Adonis preferred to spend his own share of the year with Aphrodite, he spent the greater part of his time with her until she was robbed of his company by his early death; for as soon as he was old enough, he began to go out hunting, and was gored to death by a wild boar.¹¹⁹ His death was sometimes regarded as having been more than an accident, for some accounts state that the war-god Ares, as the lover or husband of Aphrodite, sent the boar against him out of jealousy, or transformed himself into a boar to attack him; or else Artemis sent the boar against him¹²⁰ (presumably to punish Aphrodite for having caused the death of her own favourite, Hippolytos, see p. 310).

Ovid offers a divergent account of Adonis' story, saying that he was brought up by local nymphs after he was born from the myrrh tree in Arabia, and first attracted the attention and love of Aphrodite when he grew up to become an exceptionally handsome young man. Since hunting was his main enthusiasm, she abandoned her usual habits and haunts to accompany him through the wilds on his hunting trips, tucking her clothes up to her knees just as though she were Artemis. She kept well

clear of the fiercest beasts, however, such as lions, wolves, and boars, and urged her young favourite to do the same, warning that his youthful beauty was no defence against their teeth and claws. Her worst fears were realized when he was carried away by his enthusiasm and tried to kill a wild boar with his spear, for it chased after him and sank its tusks into his groin, inflicting a fatal wound. The grief-stricken goddess sprinkled nectar into his blood, causing a fragile blood-red flower, an anemone, to spring up from it. Or else the first rose sprang from his blood while the anemone sprang from Aphrodite's tears; or the anemone was turned red by the blood of Adonis after having originally been white, and the rose was turned red too when Aphrodite pricked herself on a thorn as she was wandering around barefooted in her grief; or Adonis was transformed into a rose.¹²¹

Under the prettiness of this legend, we can see the outlines of an oriental myth of the Great Mother and of her lover who dies as the vegetation dies, but always comes to life again. This is most obvious in the story in which he spends part of the year – evidently the dead season – with Persephone, queen of the Underworld, but returns for the rest of the year to the arms of Aphrodite. This is simply a reworking, of course, in a rather different context, of the myth in which Persephone herself spends part of the year below with Hades and part above with her mother, the corn-goddess Demeter (see p. 94). The death of the youthful favourite at the time of the dying of nature is also figured in the story of his premature death in the hunting field. His cult as a dying god is already in evidence in the poetry of Sappho (late seventh century BC) and was popular in Greece from the fifth century. From Sappho we have the following two lines: 'Tender Adonis is dying, Cytherea [i.e. Aphrodite]; what are we to do?', 'Beat your breasts, girls, and rend your robes';¹²² and a complete, if more artificial, lament for Adonis is preserved among the bucolic poetry of the Hellenistic period. In addition to the ceremonial singing and wailing of dirges, which were sometimes conducted over an effigy of the dead boy, the cult of Adonis, which was a women's cult for the most part, involved the preparation of 'gardens of Adonis', in which plants were germinated in very shallow soil in pots or potsherds, and so grew up with unnatural speed and withered just as quickly.¹²³

The story of Aphrodite's love for the Trojan hero ANCHISES follows a similar pattern in so far as the goddess, who here assumes the traits of the Great Mother of Ida, becomes involved with a younger male partner in a land associated with the Asianic mother-goddess. In this case, however, the tale is woven into heroic legend to account for the origin of a major hero, the great Aineias, see further on p. 445.

Aphrodite, Ares, and Hephaistos

The last two legends represent the goddess not as married, but as forming more or less temporary unions with young males much inferior to herself, a proceeding quite characteristic of eastern goddesses, who are essentially mothers rather than wives, and beside whom their lovers or husbands sink into comparative insignificance, even if some of them are not unimportant gods. Within the Olympian circle, Aphrodite is linked to two gods, the fire-god Hephaistos, who was of eastern origin like herself, and the war-god Ares. In a famous tale in the *Odyssey*, Hephaistos is presented as her

husband, and he catches her out when she secretly engages in an adulterous love affair with Ares, having learned of this from the sun-god Helios, who can see everything as he travels across the sky and came to tell him that Ares had been sleeping with his wife in his own home. Not daring to confront Ares on equal terms, Hephaistos fashioned a subtle net, which was immensely strong but so finely spun as to be invisible, and spread it around his bed, causing the guilty couple to be caught up in it when they lay down to make love; and he then summoned the other gods to witness the sight. The goddesses stayed in their homes for shame, but all the gods hurried to the scene, and unquenchable laughter arose among them when they saw the effects of the fire-god's ingenuity. Hephaistos was very angry at first and talked of a divorce, threatening to reclaim the bride-price that he had paid to Zeus for his faithless daughter; but Poseidon pacified him by promising to stand surety for the compensation that was due to a wronged husband. So he released the captives from the net, allowing Ares to depart to his home in Thrace and Aphrodite to set off for her temple at Paphos in Cyprus, where she was bathed and adorned by the Graces.¹²⁴ This tale is obviously not meant to be taken too seriously; indeed, Hephaistos is generally a none too serious figure in myth, as we have seen.

Although it is often stated on the basis of this story that Aphrodite was married to Hephaistos, as though that were the regular tradition in antiquity, this Homeric passage is in fact rather exceptional in that regard. Hephaistos has another wife in the *Theogony*, and indeed in the *Iliad* (see p. 180), and it is clear from visual images from the archaic period onwards – and literary references from the classical period onwards – that Ares was generally regarded as the husband of Aphrodite, or at least as her accredited lover. On the François vase, for instance, from the early sixth century BC, she is shown arriving at the marriage of Peleus in the same chariot as Ares (just as Zeus arrives with Hera, and Poseidon with Amphitrite), while Pindar and Aeschylus refer to him directly as her husband.¹²⁵ For the children who are credited to the couple in the *Theogony* and elsewhere, see p. 72. The two deities were connected in cult to some extent, sharing a temple for example on the road between Argos and Mantinea.¹²⁶ Aphrodite could sometimes be a martial goddess, as in her Spartan cult as Aphrodite Areia,¹²⁷ but it is hard to say whether this had anything to do with her mythical union with Ares. Their union could be viewed in any case as a piquant union of opposites, which resulted most appropriately in the birth of a daughter called Harmonia.¹²⁸

Although Aphrodite was sometimes credited with various other children, including Hermaphroditos (see p. 206), Priapos (see p. 205) and Eryx (see p. 252), no love stories are recorded for her beyond those already mentioned. In her myths, the love-goddess is thus by no means promiscuous. She occasionally intervened to help mortal lovers, notably Paris after he judged her to be more beautiful than Hera and Athena (see pp. 455ff), and the suitor of Atalanta (see p. 552); and conversely, she occasionally acted against mortals who refused to honour her or scorned the gift of love, as we have just seen with Smyrna, or in the story of Hippolytos (see p. 310). Mention should also be made of two striking tales from the Greek islands, in which Aphrodite brought a statue of a beautiful woman to life for Pygmalion, king of Cyprus (see p. 570), and rejuvenated PHAON, a virtuous ferryman of Mytilene in

Lesbos (see p. 569).

As in mythology, so in art, Aphrodite wavers between several types. Her oriental figures, as in the archaic idols found in Cyprus, show her in crudely naked form, typically with one or both hands up by her breasts and with her genitals frankly emphasized. In her earlier Greek statues, however, from the archaic and classical periods, she is decorously draped in long robes for the most part, and possesses a certain stiff dignity such as would not be inappropriate to Aphrodite Pandemos. From the mid-fourth century onwards, sculptures regularly portray her in graciously naked or semi-naked form, in images that vary with the skill of the artist from meritorious studies of the body of a healthy and well-proportioned woman to monuments that convey a suggestion of an ideal beauty. The Cnidian Aphrodite of Praxiteles (c. 350 BC, now lost, but familiar from copies), which showed her laying her clothing aside as she was about to enter her bath, became her most celebrated image in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The most popular of her surviving statues, the Venus de Milo (i.e. Aphrodite of Melos) in the Louvre, is an original work from the second century BC.

Notes

¹ Eur. *Bacchae* 26ff.

² Ov. *Met.* 3.259–298, cf. D.S. 3.64.3–4, Apollod. 3.4.3 (similar though less detailed); but in D.S. 4.2.1–3 Semele makes the fateful request on her own initiative. From the earlier tradition, see Eur. *Bacch.* 1–9 (Hera to blame for Semele's fate, no details); Hyg. *Fab.* 167, 179 (only way to know full pleasure of intercourse with a god).

³ Hom. *Il.* 14.325 (Semele bore Dionysos to Zeus), Hes. *Theog.* 941–3 (likewise, and that mother and child divinized), *Hom. Hymn 1 to Dionysos* (Zeus brought him to birth, but account lost; the epithet *eiraphiotes* as applied to Dionysos in lines 2, 17 and 20 is significant in this regard if it means 'insewn'); Pi. *Ol.* 2.25–6 (first states that Semele killed by thunderbolt), cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 6ff; full story of birth of D., D.S. 3.64.3–5 (cf. 4.2.3), Apollod. 3.4.3, Ov. *Met.* 3.298–315.

⁴ Hes. *Theog.* 940–3.

⁵ Pi. *Ol.* 2. 25–6 (apparently rendered divine by thunderbolt), *Pyth.* 3.99 (refers to Semele by divine name of Thyone); D. descended to Hades to fetch her, D.S. 4.25.4, Apollod. 3.5.3; through Alcyonian Lake, Paus. 2.37.5.

⁶ *Hom. Hymn 1 to Dionysos* 1–8, *Hom. Hymn 26 to Dionysos* 1–6.

⁷ E.g. D.S. 4.2.3.

⁸ Hom. *Il.* 6.132–3.

⁹ Hesych. s.v. Nysa.

¹⁰ Ov. *Met.* 7.294–6.

¹¹ Pher. 3F90, Apollod. 3.4.3.

¹² Paus. 3.24.3–4.

¹³ See e.g. the discussion and references in W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge, Mass., 1985, p. 162.

¹⁴ Hom. *Il.* 6.130–40.

¹⁵ Pher. 3F90.

¹⁶ Apollod. 3.5.1.

¹⁷ Hyg. *Fab.* 132; self-mutilation also in Serv. *Aen.* 3.14, Vat. Myth. 1.122.

¹⁸ Hyg. *Fab.* 242.

¹⁹ Soph. *Antig.* 955–65.

²⁰ *Hom. Hymn 7 to Dionysos* 2–6.

²¹ *Ibid.* 6–24.

²² *Ibid.* 32–57.

²³ Ov. *Met.* 3.582–3, 687–91.

²⁴ Apollod. 3.5.3; Naxos as destination, Ov. *Met.* 3.636ff, Hyg. *Fab.* 134, Vat. Myth. 1.122 and generally in later sources.

- 25 Apollod. 3.5.3, cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.658–69, Hyg. *Fab.* 134, Nonnus 45.105ff, etc.
- 26 Hyg. *Fab.* 134.
- 27 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.17.
- 28 Eumelos fr. 28 and 29 Tsagalis.
- 29 Pi. *Dith.* 2, Eur. *Bacchae* 73–82, cf. Apollod. 3.51.
- 30 Apollod. 3.5.2.
- 31 Eur. *Bacch.* 23–42.
- 32 Ibid. 215–58.
- 33 Ibid. 576–970.
- 34 Ibid. 971–1215.
- 35 Ibid. 1280–1392. On this myth, see also Apollod. 3.5.2, Ov. *Met.* 3.511–733, Hyg. *Fab.* 184.
- 36 Ant. Lib. 10; on death of Hippasos, see also Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 38.
- 37 Ael. *V.H.* 3.42.
- 38 Ov. *Met.* 3.1–41, 389–415.
- 39 Ov. *Met.* 3.559–60, 4.607–14.
- 40 Suid. s.v. Melanaigis.
- 41 Schol. *Il.* 1.59.
- 42 Both versions in Hyg. *Astr.* 2.4.
- 43 Apollod. 3.14.7, Hyg. *Fab.* 130, *Astr.* 2.4, schol. *Il.* 22.29, Prob. *Georg.* 2.385.
- 44 Hyg. ll.cc., Serv. *Georg.* 2.389.
- 45 Ibid. and *Fab.* 230 (the suggestion that Canicula can be identified with Procyon, i.e. the constellation of the Lesser Dog, is erroneous; it is really the dog-star, Greek Seirios).
- 46 *Hom. Hymn* 7 to Dionysos 2–6.
- 47 Hes. *Theog.* 947–9.
- 48 Paus. 10.29.2.
- 49 Children listed in late sources only, notably Apollod. *Epit.* 1.9 (Thoas, Staphylos, Oinopion and Peparethos), schol. A.R. 3.997 (Oinopion, Thoas, Staphylos, Latramys, Euanthes, Tauropolis). There was an alternative tradition in which Oinopion and Staphylos were children of Theseus and Ariadne, Ion of Chios 204 (as cited in Plut. *Thes.* 20).
- 50 Ov. *Fast.* 3.409ff, Nonnus 10.175ff.
- 51 Hes. *Theog.* 938–19 (daughter of Atlas), *Hom. Hymn. Hermes* 1–16 (nymph), Apollod. 3.10.1–2.
- 52 *Hom. Hymn. Hermes* 17–8.
- 53 Ibid. 20–67.
- 54 Ibid. 68–86.
- 55 Ant. Lib. 23.3 and Apollod. 3.10.2 respectively.
- 56 *Hom. Hymn. Hermes* 87–93.
- 57 Ibid. 94–153.
- 58 Ibid. 154–83.
- 59 Ibid. 184–234.
- 60 Ibid. 235–396.
- 61 Ibid. 397–506.
- 62 Ibid. 507–80.
- 63 Ibid. 552–63.
- 64 Alcaeus 308.
- 65 Apollod. 3.10.2. In the *Hom. Hymn. Hermes*, 51, Hermes strings the lyre with sheep-gut.
- 66 Ant. Lib. 23.
- 67 Ov. *Met.* 2.676–707.
- 68 Et. Magn s.v. Hermaion.
- 69 *Hom. Od.* 5.43ff, *Il.* 24.322ff respectively.
- 70 *Hom. Il.* 1.577–9 and 14.338 with *Od.* 8.312.
- 71 Hes. *Theog.* 927–9, Apollod. 1.3.5 (also noting Homeric version), cf. the humorous treatment of the matter in Lucian *de Sacrificiis* 6.
- 72 *Hom. Il.* 18.395–405, cf. *Hom. Hymn. Apollo* 317–21 (tended by Thetis and her sisters).
- 73 *Hom. Hymn. Apollo* 317ff.
- 74 Alcaeus 349, Pi. fr. 283 SM.
- 75 Paus. 1.20.2, Lib. *Narrat.* 30, Hyg. *Fab.* 166.
- 76 Alcaeus 349.

- 77 Hom. *Il.* 1.590–4; Apollod. and Lucian *Il.cc.* both assume that he was lamed by the fall.
- 78 Hom. *Il.* 1.597–600
- 79 See esp. Hom. *Il.* 18.368–477.
- 80 Eratosth. 32 (Hes. fr. 148a). Forge on Lemnos, Cic. *N.D.* 3.22, schol. *Il.* 14.231.
- 81 Call. *Hymn* 4.141–7. Hephaistos is addressed as lord of Etna in Eur. *Cycl.* 599.
- 82 Thuc. 3.88 (reputed to be at Hiera in the Aeolian Islands); Call. *Hymn* 3.46–50 (at isle of Lipara), cf. A.R. 4.760–2 with schol. 761, Theoc. 2.133–4; Verg. *Aen.* 8.414–54 (Lipara, linked to Etna by an underground cavern and galleries).
- 83 Call. *Hymn* 3.46–60, cf. Verg. *I.c.*
- 84 His own house, Hom. *Il.* 18.369ff, houses for other gods, 1.605–8, cf. A.R. 3.36–8 (palace of Aphrodite).
- 85 Hom. *Il.* 20.10–2.
- 86 Ibid. 14.166–8, 338–9.
- 87 Paus. 10.5.5, Pi. *Paeon* 11.
- 88 Hom. *Il.* 18.417–21 and 373–9 respectively.
- 89 Hom. *Od.* 7.91–4.
- 90 Hom. *Il.* 18.468ff, 8.194–5, 2.100–1 respectively.
- 91 Mimn. 12.
- 92 Hes. *Theog.* 945–6, Hom. *Il.* 18.382–3; cf. Hom. *Od.* 8.266ff, in which he is married to Aphrodite.
- 93 A.R. 1.202–6.
- 94 Paus. 2.31.4–5, Plut. *de Mus.* 5.
- 95 Hes. *Theog.* 188–202, Hom. *Il.* 5.370–1 with 3.374.
- 96 Kypris, Hom. *Il.* 5.330, 422, etc.; her sanctuary at Paphos in Cyprus, Hom. *Od.* 8.362–3, *Hom. Hymn. Aphrodite* 58–9.
- 97 Hes. *Theog.* 192–3; sanctuary, Hdt. 1.105, Paus. 3.23.1.
- 98 Pl. *Symp.* 180de, Xen. *Symp.* 8.9.
- 99 Paus. 1.22.3.
- 100 Theoc. *Epigram* 13, Paus. 9.16.2.
- 101 Pi. fr. 107 (Bowra).
- 102 Hes. *Theog.* 120–2 (in cosmogony), 201–2 (with Aphrodite).
- 103 Simon. 575.
- 104 Sappho 130, 47, 188, Ibucus 287.
- 105 Eur. *Med.* 530–1, cf. *Iph. Aul.* 544ff.
- 106 Paus. 9.27.1.
- 107 A.R. 3.83–166 (Aphrodite bribes him to take action), 275–98 (he shoots an arrow into Medeia).
- 108 Ov. *Met.* 1.452–77.
- 109 Apuleius *Golden Ass* 4.28–6.26.
- 110 Hes. *Theog.* 201–2, 62–5.
- 111 Aesch. *Suppl.* 1035–43; Arist. *Peace* 456, Lucian *D.D.* 20.16, *Anth. Pal.* 12.157, etc.
- 112 Paus. 1.30.1.
- 113 Paus. 6.23.3,5.
- 114 Ezekiel 8.14, *et ecce ibi mulieres sedebant plangentes Adonidem*; the Pentateuch and the Authorized Version keep the name Thamouz/Tammuz as in the Hebrew text.
- 115 Hes. fr. 139.
- 116 Apollod. 3.14.4, Ov. *Met.* 10.298–514, schol. Lyc. 829, Serv. *Ecl.* 10.18, etc.; much of this may go back to Panyasis, see fr. 22 Davies. See also Hyg. *Fab.* 58 (somewhat different).
- 117 Ant. Lib. 34.
- 118 Ov. *Met.* 10.469–502.
- 119 Apollod. 3.14.4.
- 120 Both variants in schol. Lyc. 831; see also Serv. *Aen.* 5.72, *Ecl.* 10.18, schol. Theoc. 1.3 and 47.
- 121 Ov. *Met.* 10.535–727.
- 122 Sappho 140a; Bion 1.
- 123 Rites of Adonis, see e.g. Plut. *Nicias* 13 (regarding an event set in 415 BC), Arist. *Lysistr.* 388ff (refers to same event); gardens of Adonis, Hesych. and Suid. s.v. *Adonidos kepoi* (and paroemiographers on the same), Pl. *Phdr.* 276b, Theophrastus *History of Plants* 6.7.3.
- 124 Hom. *Od.* 8.266–366.
- 125 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.87–8, Aesch. *Suppl.* 664–5 (her *eunator*).
- 126 Paus. 2.25.1.
- 127 Paus. 3.17.5.

128 Hes. *Theog.* 933–7 (together with Panic and Fear, see p. 169, who are very much their father's children).

Lesser Deities and Nature-Spirits

Before we move on from divine to heroic mythology, there are various lesser divinities who remain to be considered. From among the children who were fathered by Zeus with goddesses other than Hera (see pp. 73ff.), three gracious groups of sister-deities, the Muses, Charites (Graces), and Horai (Seasons), have yet to be discussed; and ranking somewhere between deities such as these and the mortal race were the countless nature-spirits who haunted the waters, countryside, and wilderness. Of most importance in everyday belief were the female spirits, the nymphs, familiar presences who were very popular in rural cult; their main male equivalents, the Satyrs and Seilenoi, belonged more to the world of art and literature, as mythical attendants of Dionysos. These male nature-spirits had animal features and ill-controlled appetites, as did the rustic god Pan, who originated in Arcadia as a god of shepherds and herdsmen and figures in characteristic myths as a frustrated lover. The Phrygian myth of Attis and Cybele strikes a more exotic note in so far as it finds a place in the corpus of Greek mythology. We will conclude by examining various minor gods and daimones who are not included in Hesiod's genealogies, ranging from the Couretes and Corybantes to the lustful Priapos and the wedding-god Hymenaios.

The Muses

In Hesiod's account, as we have seen, the MUSES (Mousai) were born to Zeus by Mnemosyne, the personification of Memory;¹ but a rival genealogy, which may have originated in a cosmological poem by Alcman (seventh century BC), claimed that they were born in the very earliest times as daughters of Ouranos and Gaia.² Some authors tried to reconcile the two accounts by suggesting that there were two generations of Muses, the ancient Muses who were daughters of Heaven and their later-born companions who were daughters of Zeus.³

The Muses first appear in the works of Homer and Hesiod as goddesses on whom the epic poet relies for his inspiration, his memory, and aspects of his knowledge. In the introductory section of the *Theogony*, Hesiod tells how the Muses of Mt Helicon once approached him as he was shepherding his flocks under the mountain and granted him his gift of song, breathing a divine voice into him to enable him to celebrate things that will be and things that have been in times gone by.⁴ Scholars

have been unable to agree on whether the poet was describing a genuine vision or dream of some kind, or whether he was merely following a literary convention. Hesiod goes on to say that the Muses delight the heart of their father Zeus on Olympus by singing of things past, present, and future, and of the race of the gods, and of mortals, and of giants.⁵ In contrast to poets of more recent times, who have tended to appeal to their Muse as a source of poetic afflatus, ancient poets place more emphasis on the wisdom and knowledge of the Muses as deities who know all that is worth telling, and who can give the poet the ability both to tell it and also to remember it (a point that was especially important to oral poets of early times). Homer not only invokes the Muse as an unnamed goddess at the beginning of the *Iliad*, but appeals to the Muses at greater length in the second book of the epic before providing his long muster-roll of the Greek commanders and their forces;⁶ although this would hardly seem to be the most poetic part of the poem, it contains quantities of detailed and irreplaceable information about the heroic past that needed to be remembered if it was to be passed on to future generations, and is still of great value to the modern mythologist. Homer tells the Muses that he needs their aid at this point because they are 'deities and are present at all things, and know all things, while we hear no more than a rumour and have no knowledge'.⁷ As time passed, these wise and helpful goddesses came to be enrolled as the patrons of other forms of literature as they developed, and, by a natural extension, of other arts and intellectual pursuits also, such as philosophy and astronomy.

According to the standard tradition, as established by Hesiod, there were nine Muses, named Cleio, Euterpe, Thaleia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polhymnia, Ourania, and Calliope.⁸ In local cult and tradition, however, they were sometimes represented as being fewer in number and with different names (see below, p. 192). They are mentioned as being nine in number in a passage in the *Odyssey*,⁹ but in a part of the poem that may well have been added after Homer's time. Their pretty 'speaking names', which were probably invented by Hesiod himself, would originally have been devised to reflect aspects of their common nature and shared activities; since they liked to dance and sing, for instance, 'delighting in their beautiful voice',¹⁰ four of them were called Calliope (Beautiful Voice), Polhymnia (Many Songs), Melpomene (She who Sings), and Terpsichore (Delighting in the Dance). It was not until a considerably later period that authors tried to assign individual functions to each of the Muses in accordance with the specific meaning of her name. *Calliope* of the beautiful voice could then be regarded as the Muse of epic poetry specifically, and *Polhymnia* as the Muse who concerned herself with hymns to the gods (or later, pantomime), and *Terpsichore* as the Muse of choral lyric and dancing. *Cleio* (or *Clio* in Latin form) is still familiar as the Muse of history, a responsibility that she acquired because her name might suggest that she celebrates (*kleiei*) the glorious deeds (*kleia*) of heroes and heroines of the past. *Thaleia* (Good Cheer) could be fittingly enlisted as the Muse of comedy, *Ourania* (the Heavenly) as the Muse of astronomy, *Erato* (the Lovely or Desirable) as the Muse of lyric poetry, which is so often erotic in content, and *Euterpe* (she who gladdens) as the Muse of flute-playing. *Melpomene* for her part commonly presided over tragedy. These are merely examples, since individual Muses are credited with different functions in different sources.¹¹

This division of labour should not be taken too seriously, however, for it was simply a game at the best and an exercise in pedantry at the worst.

Although the names of the Muses would seem to be of Indo-European origin, their etymology remains a matter for conjecture. The principal centres of their cult in early times were the area of Mt Olympos on the Macedonian border, including Pieria immediately to the north, and Mt Helicon in Boeotia, but they had lesser cults throughout the Greek world. Homer calls them the Olympian Muses and remarks that they had their homes on Mt Olympos, whereas Hesiod, as a Boeotian, received his call from them in their main southern haunts, and tells how they would sing and dance on Helicon after first bathing in a spring on that mountain.¹² Hesiod refers to them as ‘Muses from Pieria’, however, at the beginning of the *Works and Days*, and describes correspondingly in the *Theogony* how Mnemosyne bore them there to Zeus, after he had lain with her for nine nights in her holy bed remote from the other gods.¹³ In relation to their different haunts, they could be called the Heliconian or Olympian Muses (both titles are applied by Hesiod) or the Pierian Muses (a title that first appears in Solon and the Hesiodic *Shield*, although Hesiod says much the same in referring to them as Muses from Pieria);¹⁴ but the use of such titles in no way implies that there was thought to be more than one group of Muses. Their names and number could vary in local cult and tradition, so that three were honoured at Sicyon, for instance, while they were described in other places as being five, seven, or eight in number. Although Pausanias claims that the Heliconian Muses were originally three in number, the names that he cites for them – Melete, Mneme, and Aoide, i.e. Study, Memory, and Song – are of such a nature that it is unlikely he is reporting a genuinely ancient tradition.¹⁵ It has often been suggested that they may have originated as water-spirits or spring-nymphs, but the idea is not confirmed by any definite evidence from the early tradition. The Romans identified them with some obscure deities of their own, the Camenae, who had a sacred grove and spring outside the Porta Capena at Rome.

Like other deities, the Muses were jealous of their honour, and their only myths of any real significance tell how they punished mortals who dared to challenge them as singers. The Thracian bard THAMYRIS (or Thamyras), who was a son of the mythical musician Philammon and a grandson of Apollo (see p. 554), became so skilled at singing to the lyre (*kithara*) that he boasted that he could out-sing even the Muses themselves. According to Homer’s brief account of his legend, they encountered him at Dorion, a town in Nestor’s kingdom in the western Peloponnese, and were so angered by his presumptuous boast that ‘they maimed him, and took away his wondrous gift of song and caused him to forget his lyre-playing’.¹⁶ Later sources specify that they blinded him (as Homer may in fact have wished to imply, even if his language is imprecise). Although Sophocles wrote a play about him, we have to rely on the Hellenistic mythographer Asclepiades for the next full account of his story, which was probably derived from a tragic source. He engaged in contest with the Muses in his Thracian homeland, so we are told, on the agreement that he would be able to sleep with all of them if he won, in accordance with what he claimed to be the polygamous custom of the land, while they for their part would be able to treat him just as they wished if he should lose. When he was defeated, as was

inevitably the case, they proceeded to deprive him of his eyes.¹⁷ Apollodorus provides a very similar account, saying that they deprived him of his eyes and also of his skills as a minstrel.¹⁸ His stage-mask in tragedy showed his right eye as black and his left eye as white,¹⁹ presumably to illustrate his condition before and after his defeat.

In a later story of this kind, probably of Hellenistic origin, the Muses met with a challenge from the PIERIDES or EMATHIDES, the daughters of Pieros, king of Emathia or Pella in Macedonia. In the version ascribed to Nicander, Pieros, an earth-born king of Emathia, fathered a family of nine daughters at much the same time as when the Muses were fathered by Zeus. These daughters, the Emathides, formed a choir to rival that of the Muses, and the two groups put their skills to the test in a singing contest on Mt Helicon. When the Emathides raised their voices, the whole of nature darkened and nothing paid heed to their chorus; but when the Muses sang, the sky and stars and the sea and rivers ceased from their motions, and Mt Helicon swelled with pleasure, rising up into the sky until Pegasos, at the order of Poseidon, halted the mountain's ascent by striking its summit with his hoof. To punish the Emathides for having presumed to challenge them, the Muses transformed them into birds of various different kinds.²⁰ Or, in Ovid's account, the contest was judged by a jury of nymphs, who voted unanimously in favour of the Muses; and when the Pierides reacted to their defeat by abusing the victors, the Muses transformed them into magpies, harsh-voiced birds that can mimic human speech.²¹ Since Pierides was a title that could be applied to the Muses in connection with their cult in Pieria, it is not hard to see how the idea could have arisen of a contest between them and the daughters of the eponym of Pieria. According to a strange legend of a comparable nature, Hera once persuaded the Sirens to match their voices against those of the Muses, but the Muses won and plucked out the feathers of the Sirens (who had bird-like bodies, see p. 508) to make crowns for themselves.²²

According to a curious tale recorded by Ovid alone, Pyreneus, king of Daulis in Central Greece, once offered shelter to the Muses when they were caught by a rainstorm while travelling to their temple on Mt Parnassos. Although he recognized who they were and assumed a humble and reverent tone when inviting them into his palace, he barred his doors to prevent them from being able to leave and then tried to rape them. They simply flew away, however, and when Pyreneus tried to chase after them by launching himself from the battlements, he plunged headlong to the ground below and was killed. This Pyreneus is otherwise unknown, and it seems likely that this story was invented by Ovid himself.²³

There is otherwise little to record about the Muses as mythical figures. It would naturally be supposed that they would sing and dance at the gatherings of the gods, perhaps with Apollo, another great patron of music, as their companion and leader (hence his title of Mousagetes, or Leader of the Muses); and on special occasions, they might sing in the presence of mortals on the earth below, as when they led the wedding-songs at the marriages of Cadmos and Peleus (see pp. 333 and 430), or arrived with Thetis and the Nereids to sing dirges for the dead Achilles (see p. 478). Although they might be best imagined as a group of virgin goddesses, children are quite often ascribed to one or another of them, above all because they seemed to be

appropriate mothers for mythical musicians. Singers or dancers such as Orpheus and Linos or the Sirens and Corybantes are thus regularly identified as being offspring of a Muse.²⁴

The Charites (Graces) and Horai (Seasons)

The CHARITES were lovely daughters of Zeus, usually imagined as being three in number, who embody all that is beautiful and charming, and can thus lend grace and allure (*charis*) to nature and works of art, and to every area of life. They are known as the GRACES in English in accordance with Latin usage (for their name was translated into *Gratiae* in Latin). Although they have no proper myths of their own, they are mentioned with some frequency as beings who bring charm to the gatherings of the gods, and more particularly as associates of Aphrodite and the Muses. In the *Iliad*, the goddess of love wears an immortal robe, which had been woven for her by them, and in the *Odyssey*, she is said to have been bathed, anointed, and dressed by them in her sanctuary in Cyprus after being caught in adultery by Ares (see p. 185).²⁵ Or, in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, she is bathed and dressed by them in happier circumstances before she sets off to seduce Anchises.²⁶ Hesiod remarks that their home on Olympos lies beside that of the Muses,²⁷ who were often imagined as singing and dancing in their company. Sappho invokes them in three of her surviving poems, twice in conjunction with the Muses; and Pindar refers to them with notable frequency as deities who shed grace on poetry and festal occasions and many areas of life.²⁸

In Homer's view there were apparently quite a number of them, since Hera promises 'one of the younger Charites', Pasithea, to Hypnos (Sleep) as a wife,²⁹ but Hesiod represents them as forming a triad in accordance with the standard later conception, as goddesses who were borne to Zeus by the Oceanid nymph Eurynome. Hesiod calls them Aglaia (Splendour), Euphrosyne (Joy), and Thaleia (Good Cheer), giving them names that reflect their special function in bringing grace and delight to social gatherings and festivities³⁰; for, as Pindar remarks, 'not even the gods can order dances or feasts without the aid of the holy Charites'.³¹ It is stated in the latter part of the *Theogony* that the eldest of them, Aglaia, became the wife of Hephaistos, an idea probably suggested by the fact that the *Iliad* presents him as having been married to Charis (Grace personified).³² Although they could also be regarded as nature-goddesses who caused the crops and vegetation to flourish in a pleasing manner, this aspect of their nature fell into the background; it is still reflected, however in their names in Athenian cult, in which there were two Charites known as Auxo (i.e. fosterer of growth) and Hegemone (she who leads, i.e. brings the plants forth from the earth).³³ They were portrayed quite often in the visual arts, in which their three attractive maidenly figures, initially draped but quite often naked in later times, were a favourite subject. The portrayal, which has become familiar from Renaissance art, in which they are shown as a naked and interlaced trio, two viewed from the front and one from the back, is ultimately derived from a standard Hellenistic type. The most ancient centre of their cult was thought to have been Orchomenos in Boeotia, where they were honoured in the form of stones that were

said to have fallen from the heavens in the heroic era.³⁴

The HORAI or SEASONS, another gracious set of sister-goddesses, who are classed by Hesiod as daughters of Zeus and Themis (see p. 74), bear some resemblance to the Charites but are more closely connected with the fruits of the earth. Although the word *hora* could be used as a term for any regularly recurring period of time, whether of the year, month, or day, it is clear from the ancient literature that these deities were thought to personify the seasons of the year, even if they are sometimes misleadingly called the Hours in English. They were most commonly imagined as being three in number, and they could be pictured as representing the main seasons of spring, summer, and winter. It should be remarked, however, that it was only from the Hellenistic period onwards that each sister came to be portrayed with distinctive attributes, as representing her own particular season.

As deities who were connected in this way with the turning of the year, they were associated most closely with the seasons of growth and fertility, as goddesses who cause the plants to grow, and most especially the flowers of the spring, which adorn the landscape and also serve for the adornment of the human body. In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, they crown the newly created Pandora accordingly with spring flowers,³⁵ and in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* they clothe and bedeck the newborn goddess of love when she emerges from the sea at Cyprus.³⁶ In a surviving passage from the early epic poem the *Cypria*, Aphrodite is described similarly as clothing herself in garments that the Graces and Seasons had made for her, and had dyed with flowers of the spring, crocuses, hyacinths, violets, and roses, such flowers as are worn by the Seasons themselves.³⁷ In such connections the two sets of goddesses are really very similar, and often appear together as charming minor deities who wait upon greater ones, especially Aphrodite, and attend important weddings and dance at the gatherings of the gods.

Although the agricultural connections of the Horai remained primarily in what little cult they had, as might be inferred from their cultic titles at Athens where they were known as Thallo and Carpo (i.e. she who causes to sprout and fruit respectively),³⁸ they could also be credited with social and moral concerns as deities who protected the good order that is essential for the flourishing of agriculture, and for the maintenance of prosperity in general. This civic dimension of their responsibilities is reflected in their names in the *Theogony*, in which they are called Eunomia, Dike, and Eirene, that is to say, Good Order, Justice, and Peace³⁹. In praising an athlete from Corinth, the poet Pindar draws the moral more explicitly, saying that Eunomia dwells within the walls of that city along with her two sisters Dike and Eirene, as the sure foundation of cities and guardians of human wealth.⁴⁰ And finally, the sisters are credited with a special duty in the *Iliad* as the gate-keepers of Olympus who are responsible for opening and closing the cloud-barriers, an idea that may have arisen because they were associated with the changing weather.⁴¹

The Nymphs

Some of the most appealing figures in ancient mythology and folklore are the

multitude of NYMPHS (Nymphai) who were thought to inhabit nature in many of its aspects as spirits of the meadows and mountains, of trees and groves, and of springs, streams, and the sea. Their name literally means ‘young marriageable women’ or the like. Although some who were classed as nymphs could be quite important goddesses, as in the case of some of the Oceanids and Nereids (e.g. Amphitrite and Thetis), the mass of the nymphs were semi-divinities of comparatively minor status. They were of considerable significance in popular cult, however, precisely because they could be regarded as more accessible than the grander deities of public cult, and as beings who were more likely to be sympathetic to the everyday worries of mortals, especially those of women. They appear very frequently in myth, though often in a supporting or purely decorative role. For Hesiod’s account of the origin of the Meliai (strictly ash-tree-nymphs, but probably meaning tree-nymphs in general here), see p. 25. Homer refers to the nymphs as daughters of Zeus;⁴² Odysseus invokes them as such on two occasions when offering sacrifice and appealing for their aid, and they help him to acquire food at one point by driving wild goats towards him and his men.⁴³ They live on the fringes of divine society; when Zeus orders Themis to summon a general assembly of the gods in the *Iliad*, they attend, as do the river-gods, ‘for none of the rivers failed to come, apart from Oceanos, and none of the nymphs who haunt the lovely groves and the springs of rivers and the grassy water-meadows’.⁴⁴ Nymphs attended Artemis on her hunting trips (as already mentioned by Homer, see p. 151) and Dionysos on his revels; they were available to act as nurses to infant gods, such as Zeus and Dionysos (see pp. 69 and 164), and indeed to mortals on occasion, as in the case of Aineias (see p. 445); they can often be found in the upper reaches of heroic genealogies as the wives of earth-born first men and primordial rulers; and as figures of greater individuality, they regularly appear in transformation myths, especially in those that were devised (mostly at a fairly late period) to account for the origin of plants and springs. They are represented one and all as beautiful and youthful, as fond of music and dancing, and very often as amorous, for they repeatedly appear as partners in love not only of Satyrs but of gods and mortals too. They have prophetic powers, and can exert a strange spell on mortals, causing them to become *nympholēptai*, or filled with divine madness. Like the fairies of later folklore, whom they greatly resemble in some respects, they could become formidable when crossed, as we will see.

Nymphs were divided into different categories according to the provinces of nature that they inhabited or animated. There were nymphs of the hills, valleys, pastures, and mountains, nymphs of springs, rivers, lakes, and the sea, and wood-nymphs and tree-nymphs. Apart from the Oceanids and Nereids, who have already been discussed, the only nymphs who are likely to be encountered in translated literature under their Greek titles are the **Dryads** and **Hamadryads** (Dryades, Hamadryades), who were tree-nymphs, the **Naiads** (Naiades), who were water-nymphs, whether of springs, rivers, or lakes, and perhaps also the **Oreads** (Oreides), who were mountain-nymphs.

The Dryads, or tree-nymphs, derived their name from the word *drus*, which strictly meant an oak, but could also be used in a looser sense as a term for any large tree. Hamadryads were much the same, and although mythographers from the

Roman period sometimes drew a distinction between Hamadryads, as nymphs who lived *in* specific trees and perished with them, and Dryads, as nymphs who simply lived *among* trees, it is most unlikely that any such distinction was observed in ordinary usage. The finer classifications of nymphs need not be taken too seriously, since feminine adjectives could be attached to the noun *nymphē* virtually at will, and the Naiads, for instance, could thus be divided into Potamiads (river-nymphs), Creneids (spring-nymphs), Limniads (nymphs of pools and lakes), and so forth. The fact is that these were hardly proper names at all, and ancient authors were often careless or arbitrary in their use of such titles.

Although nymphs were certainly long-lived by comparison to human beings, they were not usually regarded as immortal. In a striking Hesiodic fragment, a naiad nymph indicates that beings of her kind have a life-span that corresponds to almost 10,000 human generations (9,720 to be precise!), for they live ten times as long as a phoenix, which lives nine times as long as a raven, which lives three times as long as a stag, which lives four times as long as a crow, which sees nine generations of men grow old.⁴⁵ It was commonly supposed that tree-nymphs died when their trees decayed or were cut down. A passage from the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, which states this of mountain-nymphs in general, deserves to be quoted in full:

the deep-breasted mountain-nymphs ... rank neither with mortals nor with immortals; they live a long life, to be sure, eating divine food and joining in lovely dances with the immortals, and the Seilenoi and keen-sighted Argeiphontes [i.e. Hermes] mingle in love with them in the depths of delightful caves; but at the time of their birth, pines or high-crowned oaks spring up with them on the nourishing earth ... and when their fated death approaches them, first these beautiful trees wither on the earth and their bark shrivels around them and their branches fall away, and then along with the trees, the souls of the nymphs leave the light of the sun.⁴⁶

As we have already seen in the case of Erysichthon (see p. 115), a man could earn the hatred or gratitude of a tree-nymph by harming or saving her tree. According to one tradition, Arcas, the hero who gave his name to Arcadia (see p. 544), fathered his family by a hamadryad nymph whose tree he had once saved. For while he was out hunting one day, the nymph Chrysopeleia appealed to him to save her tree, which was in danger of being destroyed by a flooding stream, and he diverted the stream and secured the earth at the foot of the tree; and she therefore agreed to enter into a union with him and to become the mother of his heirs.⁴⁷ In another tale of the same kind, a certain Rhoicos, a young man of Cnidos on the west coast of Asia Minor, came across an oak tree that was in danger of falling over and told his servants to prop it up. The grateful tree-nymph, who had thus been saved from perishing along with her tree, offered him the choice of whatever he most desired, and he asked to become her lover. Appointing a bee to act as their go-between, she granted his request on condition that he should have nothing to do with other women. One day, however, when the bee came to summon him while he was playing a game of draughts, he was somewhat brusque in his response, and the nymph was so angry that she turned him blind. Such at least is the story as it has come down to us; but one may suspect that the bee would have informed her of

some infidelity in the original version.⁴⁸ And finally, Apollonius tells how a certain Paraibios (a friend of the Thracian seer Phineus) brought a curse on himself and his children by ignoring the tears and pleas of a hamadryad nymph when she begged him not to cut down her oak tree.⁴⁹

For a further example of how a nymph would react when crossed in love, we may turn to the legend of the Sicilian herdsman Daphnis (who was himself the son of a nymph in accounts that describe him as a son of Hermes). As he was tending his flocks in Sicily, a local nymph fell in love with him and took him as her lover, telling him that he would lose his sight if he should ever be unfaithful to her; and when the daughter of a local ruler subsequently took a fancy to him and plied him with wine to lure him into her bed, the angry nymph blinded him just as she had warned. He found consolation for his misfortune in singing sorrowful songs, hence the origin of pastoral verse.⁵⁰ There were many versions of this story; according to Ovid, for instance, the nymph turned him to stone; or else he was blinded as usual but prayed for help to his father Hermes, who raised him up to heaven and caused a spring to gush forth in his name at the place where he had vanished.⁵¹ In his fourth Idyll, Theocritus offers a wholly different account, in which Daphnis is said to have boasted that he was more than a match for Eros, causing Aphrodite to afflict him with an all-consuming passion that apparently caused his death.⁵² For other notable legends in which nymphs were presented as falling in love with mortals, see pp. 401 and 455.

The Satyrs and Seilenoi

It is a peculiarity of ancient Greek folklore that female nature-spirits, whether of land or sea, were imagined as being fully human in form while male nature-spirits were imagined as having animal features. The principal male nature-spirits were the SATYRS (Satyroi) and SEILENOI, lustful creatures of the wild who formed part of the retinue of Dionysos, and diverted themselves with wine-drinking, music, and the pursuit of nymphs. As spirits of the wild life of the woods and hills, and particularly of their unrestrained and unguided fertility, they would have originated as creations of the popular imagination, in much the same way as the nymphs; but they became specialized in their role as attendants of Dionysos and had no place in cult. The Satyrs and their counterparts the Seilenoi, who are not easily distinguished from one another in earlier depictions at least, were consistently portrayed as quasi-human, but as more or less grotesque in their build and features, always male, always lustful, often visibly excited, and with some part of them definitely bestial. In the earlier tradition, as in Attic vase-paintings of the sixth to fifth century BC, Satyrs are usually shown with horse's tails and ears, and sometimes with legs resembling the hind legs of horses. They also have distinctive snub-nosed facial features; the traditional portrayal of Socrates shows him as looking much like a Satyr in that respect. From the Hellenistic period onwards, they often have something of the goat about them, being shown with little horns, prick-ears, and often goat's legs. This, the type familiar from the famous Satyr of Praxiteles and other well-known works of art, clearly resembles Pan. In this later period, the Seilenoi are typically distinguished

from the Satyrs as being older (and also retaining their equine ears). We sometimes hear of Papposeilenoi (i.e. daddy Seilenoi), and while the Satyrs are often merry with wine, the Seilenoi are apt to become extremely drunk; a not uncommon subject in art is a Satyr supporting a Seilenos who has drunk to excess. In Italy, the Satyrs were identified with some native wood-spirits, the Fauni.

There is no mention of Satyrs or Seilenoi in Homer or the genuine works of Hesiod. The earliest reference to Satyrs in the surviving literature can be found in a fragment from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, which classes ‘the worthless good-for-nothing Satyrs’ with the mountain-nymphs and Couretes as children of the daughters of Doros (see p. 202).⁵³ The Seilenoi make their first literary appearance in the passage from the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* quoted above, as lovers of the mountain-nymphs. In the subsequent literature, and in artistic images too, the Satyrs and Seilenoi are a disreputable and rather comical crowd who are fond of sex and wine and dancing and revelry, and who are usually utter cowards except in so far as the Dionysiac frenzy lends them a measure of courage. At the Athenian dramatic festivals of the classical period, each set of three tragedies would be followed by a comical Satyr-play composed by the same author; the chorus consisted of a group of Satyrs with Seilenos at their head, and the plot was a burlesque of a story from myth (usually relating to the subject-matter of the preceding trilogy). An idea of the nature of this curious genre of literature can be gained from the extensive remains of Sophocles’ *Trackers* (*Ichneutai*) and the surviving *Cyclops* of Euripides, in which Seilenos and his Satyrs are introduced into the story of Odysseus and Polyphemos (see p. 506; and for an artistic portrayal of characteristic behavior, see [Figure 9.1](#)).



[Figure 9.1](#): Satyrs in action. Attic red-figure cup. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The one Satyr who stands out from the mass as an individual with a story of his own is Marsyas, who came to a bad end because he presumed to challenge Apollo to a musical contest (see p. 149). SEILENOS, the archetype or leader of the Seilenoi, is

represented as a swaggering Falstaffian figure in his role as leader of the chorus in Satyr-plays, but also appears in more serious myth as the possessor of such wisdom as is to be found among beings of his kind. He was sometimes said to have acted as tutor to the young Dionysos, and he is presented as quite a philosopher in a fragment from Pindar that shows him preaching to the mythical flautist Olympos (a son of Marsyas and the eponym of Mt Olympos in Mysia) on the vanity of worldly wealth.⁵⁴ His best-known story, which probably originated as a folk-tale, tells how Midas, king of Phrygia, sought to benefit from his wisdom. Taking advantage of Seilenos' fondness for wine, Midas ordered some servants to mix wine into his favourite spring in Macedonia (or Phrygia), and to capture him and tie him up while he was incapacitated by the liquor. When Midas questioned the captive nature-spirit, asking him what is best and most desirable for human beings, he initially refused to say anything at all; and when he was finally compelled to speak, he rebuked Midas for insisting that he should be told what it was better for him not to know, namely that the best thing for mortals is not to be born at all, and the next best to meet their death as early as possible.⁵⁵ Seilenos emerged into cult in a minor way, for Pausanias found a temple in Elis that was dedicated to him (and to him alone, without Dionysos).⁵⁶ Less impressive was his memorial at Athens, a stone of no great size on the Acropolis, just big enough for a small man to sit on, which had once served Seilenos as a seat when he had visited Attica in the train of Dionysos.⁵⁷

Another legend in which Seilenos appears in the company of Midas is the famous tale of Midas' golden touch. When Seilenos once became heavily drunk as he was travelling through Phrygia in the train of Dionysos, some local peasants bound him in chains of flowers and took him to their king. Having been instructed in the mysteries of Dionysos by Orpheus and Eumolpos, Midas knew something about the god and recognized at once that this strange captive was a companion of his. So he entertained him liberally for ten days and nights, presumably making him drunker than ever, and then restored him to his young master. Delighted to have his tutor back again, Dionysos rewarded Midas by granting him a wish, and the king asked that whatever he touched should be turned at once to gold. Although initially entranced by his good fortune, Midas soon discovered that his new-found powers brought unexpected difficulties, because his food and drink turned to gold before he could consume them. When his thirst grew insupportable and he was threatened with starvation, he prayed to Dionysos to relieve him from the sufferings that he had incurred by his boundless greed, and the god ordered him to travel to the uplands of Lydia to wash himself in the source of the river Pactolus. As soon as he did so, his strange power passed from his body into the waters of the river, whose sands and banks have gleamed with gold ever since.⁵⁸

Other male nature-spirits who were imagined as being part-animal or wholly animal in form were the river-gods and the Centaurs. If springs had nymphs as their presiding spirits, each river had its god, who was usually pictured in the form of a bull, or of a bull with a human head. River-gods were honoured in cult, and those of major rivers could be of some importance in myth, either for their legends or as progenitors of early heroes or heroines; some of the more notable river-gods have already been considered, as sons of Oceanos (see pp. 40–1). Although the semi-

equine Centaurs surely originated as creatures of folklore, as wild spirits of the mountains and forests, they appear solely as beings of the mythical past in the recorded tradition, and they will therefore be considered in connection with heroic mythology. They were associated with two areas in particular, the region of Mt Pelion in Thessaly, where they became embroiled in a conflict with the neighbouring Lapiths (see p. 311), and north-western Arcadia, where they provoked a fight with Heracles (see p. 246). The sea harboured comparable beings of mixed form, such as the fish-tailed Tritons (see p. 131).

Pan and his loves

Very similar to the Satyrs in many respects was the rustic deity PAN, an Arcadian god of shepherds and goatherds and their flocks and herds. He was usually pictured as being part-human in form and part-goat, with the horns, ears, and legs of the latter; and he was goatish in character too, for he was sportive and a vigorous, fertile nature-spirit who could also be short-tempered, especially if disturbed in his noon-tide rest.⁵⁹ A characteristic power of his, which has left its mark on ancient and modern speech, is that of causing 'panic', a wild, groundless fear that strikes groups of people and causes them to behave like frightened and stampeded animals. As a god of the wild uplands and of goatherds and shepherds, he especially liked to haunt their summer pastures in the mountains. Like them, he would divert himself with music by playing on the reed-pipe that is named after him and by singing and dancing with the nymphs.⁶⁰ It is therefore no wonder that he is prominent above all in pastoral poetry, and that, although his cult spread far beyond his native Arcadia, he remained chiefly Arcadian. Of higher social and moral developments he knew nothing, apart from the fancy of some theologians that his name meant 'All' (as *pan* can mean in Greek) and that he could be viewed accordingly as a universal god.⁶¹ The etymology itself is quite old, since Plato already plays with the thought in the *Cratylus*, and the *Homeric Hymn to Pan* explains that he was given this name by the gods because he delighted the hearts of 'all' of them.⁶² A more plausible etymology would suggest that his name comes from the same root as Latin *pa-sco* and means 'the Feeder', i.e. the pasturer of flocks. From the fifth century BC onwards, though the notion itself may be more ancient, there is also mention of Pans (Panes, Paniscoi) as a generic group.

Although Pan was commonly regarded as a son of Hermes, accounts of his parentage vary greatly, as is hardly surprising for a god of this kind who has no very close relation to any of the great Olympians. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Pan*, Hermes fathered him by the (unnamed) daughter of an Arcadian hero, Dryops; and when he was born with goat's feet, two horns, and a full beard, his nurse was so shocked that she ran off and deserted him; but Hermes was delighted with his uncouth son, and carried him up to Olympus wrapped in the skins of mountain hares to show him off to the other gods.⁶³ In later sources, Hermes is often said to have fathered him by a most improbable mother, none other than Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus; indeed, Herodotus describes this as the common view of the Greeks.⁶⁴ The whole idea is so odd that it is tempting to suppose that this Penelope

was not originally the wife of Odysseus, but an entirely different figure, perhaps an Arcadian nymph or the above-mentioned daughter of Dryops. If she did not bear Pan to Hermes, Penelope bore him to Apollo, or to her husband, or to one of her suitors or indeed all of them (a bizarre idea that was apparently inspired by the fact that the god's name can mean 'all'). Among other fancies, we find the suggestion that Zeus fathered him on Hybris (i.e. Wantonness) or that a shepherd called Crathis fathered him by one of his goats;⁶⁵ but that is quite enough on this matter.

Pan was forever pursuing the nymphs of the countryside, much like the Satyrs (although he did not share their other vice of heavy drinking, which they developed as a result of their association with Dionysos). He appears accordingly in various love stories, in which he usually meets with nothing but frustration; the previously mentioned tale of his seduction of the moon-goddess Selene (see p. 44) is something of an exception. The picturesque story of SYRINX (Pan-pipes) explains the origin of his favourite musical instrument. Syrinx was a beautiful hamadryad nymph who rejected the approaches of the Satyrs and other nature-spirits, preferring to live as a virgin huntress. On catching sight of her one day, Pan conceived a passionate desire for her; and when he found that she would have nothing to do with him, he chased her through the countryside until she arrived at the river Ladon, where she prayed to the nymph of the stream (or to Earth) to save her, and was instantly transformed into a clump of reeds. So when Pan arrived at the spot and tried to seize her, he found that he was clasping nothing more than an armful of reeds. On hearing the wind blowing through the reed-bed, he was strangely moved by the desolate sound, and proceeded to create the first Pan-pipes (*syrinx*) by cutting some reeds of unequal length and joining them together with wax. Or, in a rationalistic version, Syrinx was no more than a rustic maiden, and she merely vanished from view among the reeds as she plunged into them.⁶⁶

Pan could be associated with pine trees as a god of the high hills, and it was said that he liked to crown himself with pine-wreaths. It is therefore no surprise to hear that he should have fallen in love with a nymph called PITYS (Pine), a figure who is first mentioned in Theocritus' *Syrinx*. As in the case of Syrinx, his love was not reciprocated, and Pitys was turned into a pine tree as she fled. In another version, Boreas (the North Wind) competed with Pan for her love, and was so angry when she preferred Pan that he killed her by blowing her over a cliff; but Earth took pity on her and transformed her into a pine tree. Pines have made a mournful sound ever since whenever the North Wind blows through them.⁶⁷ This latter version was evidently inspired by the tale in which Apollo and Boreas were said to have competed for the love of Hyacinthos (see pp. 148–9), just as the former version was inspired by the myth of Apollo and Daphne (see pp. 148–9).

Pan fared no better when he fell in love with another nymph, ECHO, since she spurned him in favour of a Satyr. The outcome was more tragic on this occasion, for on finding that he could neither win her over nor run her down, he sent some shepherds mad, causing them to tear her to pieces so that only her voice survived.⁶⁸ Although she came to be associated with Narcissos as a result of Ovid's famous reworking of her story, this was a secondary development, see further on p. 564.

One of the most famous stories of Pan is that of his encounter with the Athenian

runner Philippides before the battle of Marathon in 490 BC. According to Herodotus, the Athenians sent Philippides (also called Pheidippides in some manuscripts, probably by error) to seek help from the Spartans in confronting the Persians, but although he reached Sparta on the following day, they said that their laws prevented them from marching out before the full moon. On his return, he was also able to report that Pan had hailed him in the mountains near the Arcadian city of Tegea and had told him to ask the Athenians why they paid no respect to him, although he was their friend and had often helped them before, and would do so again. Believing that this was a true story, the Athenians founded a shrine to Pan below the Acropolis when things returned to normal, and propitiated him with sacrifices and torch-races in a ceremony that was held in his honour each year⁶⁹. The tale could indeed be genuine if one assumes that the runner may have suffered a hallucination during the arduous journey. According to Pausanias, Pan told him that he would assist the Athenians at Marathon, doubtless by inducing panic fear in the Persian invaders.⁷⁰

Stranger still is a later story from Plutarch that tells of the death of Pan. During the reign of Tiberius, a ship that was sailing from Italy to Greece was becalmed near the islands of Paxos and Propaxos off north-western Greece. A voice from the shore suddenly cried 'Thamuz!', which was the name of the ship's pilot, who was an Egyptian. He made no reply at first, but finally responded to the third appeal, and the voice then told him, 'When you draw opposite Palodes, tell them that great Pan is dead'. Palodes seems to have been a place on the mainland lying opposite Corcyra (Corfu). After some discussion, Thamuz decided that he would sail past without saying anything if a breeze blew up, but would obey the voice if the calm persisted. As the ship drifted opposite Palodes in the continuing calm, he duly shouted out, 'Great Pan is dead!'; and before he had even finished, a great groan of sorrow rose up, not from one person but from many, mixed with exclamations of amazement.⁷¹ Since no trace of any such legend can be found anywhere else in the Greek tradition, and it is never suggested anywhere else that a being like Pan, minor divinity though he was, could be subject to mortality, it seems likely that Plutarch invented this strangely haunting tale for his own purposes.

Attis and Cybele; the Couretes and Corybantes

Just on the frontiers of classical belief and cult was the great Asiatic goddess CYBELE (or Cybele), with her cult-partner ATTIS. According to the cultic legend from Pessinous, a main centre of her cult in Galatia (a central province of Asia Minor), she acquired her partner in the following circumstances. Agdistis, a doublet of Cybele, sprang up from the ground in that region after Zeus shed some semen on to it in his sleep, or while he was vainly attempting to make love to Cybele. Although the newborn being had both male and female genital organs, the gods were disturbed by its appearance and chopped off the male organs; or else Dionysos did so at the will of the gods to curb its excessive and violent desires. An almond tree sprang up from them bearing nuts that were already ripe (or else a pomegranate tree bearing fruit already ripe). When Nana, a daughter of the local river Sangarios, placed some of these nuts (or a pomegranate fruit) inside her dress, the nuts (or fruit) disappeared

and she found that she was pregnant with a child. She exposed the child at birth (or her father had him exposed), but a he-goat somehow contrived to look after him (or someone recovered him and nourished him on he-goat's milk!), and he thus survived to grow up into a wonderfully handsome youth called Attis or Attes, who attracted the love of Agdistis. When he was due to marry the daughter of the king of Pessinous, the goddess grew frantically jealous, and so appeared at the wedding and drove him into a mad frenzy in which he cut off his genitals with fatal effect. Agdistis was overcome by remorse afterwards, and persuaded Zeus to grant that his body should never decay, and that his little finger should continue to move and his hair to grow. This extraordinary tale purported to explain, among other things, why the priests of Cybele were eunuchs.⁷²

In another account of the story of Attis, Cybele fell in love with him after seeing him by the river Gallos in Phrygia and kept him at her side from that time onwards; but he subsequently fell in love with a nymph and went away to live with her. Cybele was so angry that she drove him mad, causing him to cut off his genitals and to leave the nymph and return to her.⁷³ Ovid offers a version of this latter story, saying that the goddess had installed him as her temple-servant, demanding that he should remain chaste and faithful to her forever. We are told here that the nymph who aroused his love was a tree-nymph called Sagaritis, and that Cybele punished her by felling her tree and so causing her death.⁷⁴

Both in cult and in legend, Cybele was frequently identified with Rhea (see p. 33); and for that reason, her attendants, the Corybantes, were frequently confused with the Couretes, who, as already mentioned, attended the infant Zeus. Although these two groups of young male figures were certainly similar in many ways, it will be well to disentangle their traditions. The COURETES (Couretai) first appear in a rather surprising context, in a fragment from the Hesiodic *Catalogue* already mentioned in connection with the Satyrs, in which the Satyrs, the mountain-nymphs and 'the divine Couretes, playful dancers' are all described as sharing a common origin, apparently as children of the daughters of Doros.⁷⁵ For this author, then, as usually in later belief, they are superhuman beings of a lower order than the gods. They were famous in myth as the Cretan daimones who drowned out the cries of the infant Zeus by performing noisy war dances in front of the cave where he was hidden (see p. 69). Although Callimachus in the Hellenistic era is the first author to make explicit mention of this story, Euripides seems to allude to it in the *Bacchae*, and it was presumably quite ancient.⁷⁶ As beings who were proverbial for their prophetic powers, they also appear in a tale from heroic mythology in which they advise Minos, king of Crete, on how to find his lost son Glaucos (see p. 302). Apollodorus records a curious tale in which Zeus is said to have killed them for abducting his son Epaphos from Egypt (see p. 215); but since they are presumably standing in for a group of foreign divinities in this case, this cannot be regarded as part of their conventional mythology. The name of the Couretes simply means young men or young warriors, and it has long been suspected that their main story is a mythical reflection of annual rites in which choruses of Cretan youths would perform ritual dances in honour of Zeus, probably to promote fertility. In the hymn to Zeus from Palaikastro in Crete, which probably dates to the fourth century BC, such a

chorus invites the son of Cronos with music and song (and by implication, dances too) to return to his birthplace of Dicte for the coming year, and to 'leap' to bring fertility to the island's animals and crops, and also bring benefit to its cities and ships, and so forth. It is significant that Zeus should be invoked in this poem as the great Couros who had once stepped out at the head of his daimones (i.e. the Couretes, whose mythical dance is now imitated by the young men of the chorus).⁷⁷

The CORYBANTES, who were often confused or identified with the Couretes in antiquity, were Asianic rather than Cretan, as daimones who attended upon the Anatolian mother-goddess Cybele. Although there were many conflicting speculations about their parentage, they were most often said to be children of Rhea or Apollo by one parent or another, or of a certain Corybas (who was himself a son of Cybele or a fatherless son of Kore).⁷⁸ They are commonly associated with ritual dancing, and with mysteries and magical cures; it would seem that the latter were taught only to women. Plato makes several interesting allusions to the Corybantic rites, above all in a passage in the *Laws* in which he explains how they provided a cure for mental disturbances;⁷⁹ the cure was homeopathic in nature, for it was supposed that the patients could recover their mental equilibrium if their human madness could be displaced by divine madness induced by ecstatic music and dancing. The Corybantes have no proper myths except in so far as they came to be identified with the Couretes (as was doubtless inevitable after Cybele came to be identified with Rhea). Euripides already mentions them along with the Couretes (who are perhaps to be regarded as the same here) in connection with the infancy of Zeus, stating that they invented Rhea's drum at that time, evidently to be beaten while the dances were performed for the protection of Zeus.⁸⁰

Some groups of minor divinities associated with the Greek islands

The CABEIROI were more important, even if the Greek world was hardly acquainted with them until the time of Athenian greatness. They were worshipped primarily in the northern Aegean region, especially on Lemnos, but also had notable Boeotian cults at Thebes and at Anthedon on the eastern coast. Their name is of uncertain meaning and origin; although it has long been argued that it may have been derived from a Semitic word, *qabir*, meaning mighty (which accords very well with their Greek titles as the *theoi megaloi* or *dunatai*, the great or mighty gods), there is nothing provably Semitic about their ritual or the history of their cult. It may perhaps have originated in Asia Minor. Be that as it may, they presided over an ancient mystery-cult whose content and rituals are largely unrecorded. They were often identified with another group of gods who presided over a mystery-cult in the northern Aegean, the GODS OF SAMOTHRACE (who were left unnamed in connection with their cult). These latter gods were supposed to protect initiates from all manner of dangers, especially those of the sea. Their effectiveness in this regard was attested by the many votive offerings that were set up at Samothrace by seafarers who had escaped disaster (although Diogenes the Cynic pertinently

remarked that there would have been many more of them if they were also set up by those who were *not* saved⁸¹). In myth, the Argonauts were initiated at Samothrace before sailing into unknown waters (see p. 400); and in historical times, the Samothracian mysteries became widely favoured during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, coming to be regarded as second only to those at Eleusis. There is no indication that the Samothracian mysteries and those of the Cabeiroi provided initiates with better expectations for the afterlife than did those at Eleusis.

It is no surprise that the mythology of beings such as the Cabeiroi should be inconsistent. There are three Cabeiroi in the earliest literary accounts; according to Pherecydes, they were born to Hephaistos by Cabeiro, daughter of Proteus (an old man of the sea), along with three sisters, while Acusilaus prefers to believe that they were the sons of a certain Camillos who was himself a son of Hephaistos and Cabeiro.⁸² It is understandable that they should have been connected with Hephaistos since he had a special association with Lemnos (see pp. 178–9), which was a main centre of their cult. In their cultic legend at Thebes, there were apparently only two of them, a young one and an old one.⁸³ Or else there were four of them, three male and one female, named Axieros, Casmilos, Axiocersos, and Axiocersa.⁸⁴

Other strange groups of daimones who were associated with the Greek islands were the Dactyls (Fingers) and Telchines, who were pictured as smiths and sorcerers. Although the surviving record with regard to the IDAIAN DACTYLOI is complex, inconsistent, and fragmentary, it seems to have been generally agreed that they were blacksmith-magicians who were somehow connected with Rhea. As that goddess was about to give birth to Zeus on Mt Ida in Crete, she clutched the ground with her hands, and the mountain instantly brought the Dactyloi to birth, one for each of her fingers⁸⁵; or when she brought Zeus to birth in the Dictaean cave in Crete, an attendant nymph, Anchiale, strewed some dust behind her, and the Dactyloi sprang up from it.⁸⁶ Since Rhea came to be identified with Cybele, the birth of the Dactyloi was sometimes placed in Cybele's homeland in Asia Minor, on Mt Ida in the Troad. Although it would be logical for there to be ten Dactyloi as in the preceding story, their numbers vary to an eccentric degree. There were five or six male Dactyloi who acted as metalworkers, on their own or with the help of their five sisters;⁸⁷ or there were a hundred overall, or twenty-six; or, in an account ascribed to Pherecydes, there were thirty-two left-hand Dactyloi, who acted as sorcerers, and twenty right-hand Dactyloi who worked counter-magic.⁸⁸ Or, according to a fragment from an early epic called the *Phoronis*, there were three Dactyloi named Acmon (Anvil), Damnameneus (effectively Hammer), and Celmis (Smelter?) who first discovered the art of metalworking.⁸⁹ It was also said that the art was taught to them by Rhea.⁹⁰ Ovid mentions in passing that Celmis was once a friend of the infant Zeus but was later turned into adamant (a mythical metal); and it is reported elsewhere that he suffered this fate because he behaved insolently towards Mother Rhea.⁹¹ Some claimed that the Heracles who founded the Olympian Games was not the well-known hero but a dwarfish Dactyl of the same name.⁹² These scraps are just enough to tantalize the researcher, and give an idea of what a world of folklore was contained in the mass of Greek literature now lost to us.

The TELCHINES were generally thought to have been primordial inhabitants of Rhodes, although they were also associated with other places such as Cyprus, Geos, and Sicyon. According to Diodorus, they lived at Rhodes until the great flood caused them to scatter during the age of Deucalion. Looking back from the Byzantine era, the lexicon of the Souda is uncertain whether they were malicious daimones or malicious men who had the evil eye.⁹³ The former interpretation is of course the correct one; some have compared them to the gnomes and kobolds of northern European folklore. They were skilled in many arts, especially those of metalworking, which was indeed discovered by them according to some accounts; it was said that they fashioned the first statues of the gods.⁹⁴ Some traced their activities back to the very earliest times, claiming that they forged Poseidon's trident (a deed also ascribed to the Cyclopes, see p. 24) or even the sickle of Cronos.⁹⁵ They were so clever as magicians that they could alter their form and change the weather at will.⁹⁶ They were also proverbial for their malice, and were said to have sprinkled Rhodes with water from the Styx (an infernal river, see p. 99) to render it infertile.⁹⁷ It was often said that Zeus or some other god finally killed them on account of their malice and presumption.⁹⁸ According to a Rhodian tradition, Rhea entrusted the infant Poseidon to the Telchines and the Oceanid Capheiro to be reared by them on Rhodes.⁹⁹

Glaucos, Priapos, and Hymenaios

GLAUCOS (Sea-Green; sometimes distinguished as Glaucos Pontios, 'of the sea') was a minor sea-god who was honoured above all by fishermen and sailors, who could hope to benefit from his help if they fell into trouble. It was said that he himself had originally been a humble fisherman, who had plied his trade at Anthedon on the Boeotian coast until he underwent a transformation after eating some magical grass. A local landmark known as the Leap of Glaucos indicated where he was supposed to have jumped into the sea after doing so.¹⁰⁰ In Ovid's full account of the story, he had once spread out his nets and lines to count his catch, laying them on a patch of grass on which no animal would graze, and noticed that some of the fish revived and slipped back into the sea after nibbling at the grass. So he plucked and chewed some of the grass to test its properties, and felt an irresistible urge to jump into the sea after doing so; and when the deities of the sea then asked Oceanos and Tethys to purge away his mortal nature, he found himself transformed into a fish-tailed sea-god with a dark green beard.¹⁰¹ Although Aeschylus wrote a play about him, only a few fragments survive, one of them mentioning that he ate 'the immortal everlasting grass', and another indicating that his transformation was placed in northern Euboea rather than Boeotia, near the spot where Lichas met his death (see p. 268).¹⁰² Glaucos was gifted with prophetic powers, as was so often the case with sea-deities, and he was quite often presented as appearing to mythical seafarers. In Euripides' *Orestes*, for instance, he is said to have appeared to Menelaos off Cape Malea to inform him of the death of his brother Agamemnon, and he rises up from the waves in Apollonius' *Argonautica* to advise the Argonauts after they have lost two of their comrades (see p. 401).¹⁰³ For Ovid's story of his frustrated love for Scylla, see p. 509.

Although the cult of PRIAPOS arrived rather late in Greece, hardly spreading beyond its area of origin by the Hellespont until the end of the fourth century BC, it eventually became widely familiar and spread to Italy too. A preposterous little god who was represented as a more or less grotesquely misshapen man with an erect phallus of disproportionate size, he never seems to have been regarded as a very serious deity outside his original homeland. He watched over flocks, herds, and bees, and brought help to herdsmen and fishermen; in later times, he was viewed above all as a guardian of vineyards, orchards, and gardens, part scarecrow, part warning to human thieves, part luck-bringer; and in his capacity as a luck-bringer, he was often to be found at the doors of houses. Elegantly obscene Priapic verses were composed in his honour in both Greek and Latin. Such is the Priapos who is most familiar to us from his later career. In his region of origin, however, at Lampsacos and the surrounding area on the Asian shore of the Hellespont, he was a fertility-god of the first importance who was honoured on a level with the Olympian gods. Donkeys were sacrificed to him at Lampsacos, doubtless because they were credited with a lustful nature and exceptional progenerative powers.

The myths of Priapos are late and artificial; some are birth-legends from his native Hellespontine region while others are tales that link him to his special animal, the donkey. He came to be described as a son of Dionysos and Aphrodite, as is understandable since he was associated with abandonment and sex; or perhaps Aphrodite conceived him to her favourite Adonis while Dionysos was away on his campaign in India. According to a local legend, which sets his birth in Aparnis (later Abarnis) near Lampsacos, the jealous Hera touched the body of his pregnant mother to cause him to be born deformed, and Aphrodite was so horrified when she gave birth to a misshapen son with outsized genitals that she renounced him (*aparneito*, hence the name of Aparnis), abandoning him to be reared by shepherds. This story was probably inspired by the similar story that was told about the birth of Pan (see p. 199).¹⁰⁴

Ovid recounts no less than three stories in which Priapos is frustrated by the untimely braying of a donkey as he is about to attempt a rape. According to one such tale in the *Fasti*, he crept up on the nymph Lotis while she was lying asleep in the open air after a feast of the gods; but at the critical moment, the ass of Seilenos brayed aloud, causing the nymph to awaken with a start and Priapos to be exposed to general ridicule. He was so angry that he killed the donkey and welcomed sacrifices of donkeys ever afterwards.¹⁰⁵ Later in the same poem, Ovid tells the same story about Vesta (the Roman equivalent of Hestia see p. 124) to explain why donkeys were rested and garlanded on her feast day at Rome.¹⁰⁶ Although there is no record of the preceding version in surviving Greek sources, it is reasonable to assume that it originated in Greece as a cultic aetiology, and that Ovid adapted it to provide a mythical explanation for this purely Roman practice associated with the Vestalia. He would doubtless have excluded one of the versions if he had lived to complete the *Fasti*. This is not quite the end of the matter since Ovid offers a different account of Priapos' attempted rape of Lotis in the *Metamorphoses*, stating that she was turned into a lotus tree (presumably in response to a prayer of her own) as she was fleeing from him.¹⁰⁷ This story is evidently modelled on the famous

transformation myth in which Daphne was turned into a laurel tree (*daphnē*) as she was fleeing from Apollo (see pp. 148–9). Ovid probably invented it to accord with the general theme of the poem (although it is of course possible that this was the original Greek version of the story of the attempted rape).

According to another donkey story, probably derived from a Satyr-play, Dionysos once came up against an impassable swamp as he was travelling to his father's oracle at Dodona to seek a cure for a fit of madness that had been inflicted on him by Hera. He found a way across, however, by riding through the marshes on a donkey that he encountered there; and after achieving his cure at Dodona, he rewarded the beast by granting it the power of human speech. The donkey then used its new-found powers to challenge Priapos to a contest over the size of their genital organs; but the god proved to be better-endowed and killed the beast to punish it for its impertinence.¹⁰⁸ This story is preserved in the astral myth that was devised to explain the origin of the two stars in the constellation Cancer that were (and still are) known as the Asses, or Aselli in Latin. Since there were two such stars, complications were introduced into the tale when it was adapted into a star-myth, but these need not concern us here.

To pass on to a more respectable god, HYMENAIOS was the deity who presided over weddings. His name was derived from the traditional wedding-cry of *Hymen o Hymenaie* (or the like), which could be interpreted as an invocation to a deity called Hymenaios (or Hymen). He was commonly pictured as a handsome young man, tall and rather epicene, carrying a bridal torch and wreath as his attributes. It is understandable that he should usually be classed as a son of one or other of the Muses,¹⁰⁹ since these were the deities who led the wedding-song (*hymenaios*) at marriages of the gods; or else he is described in some Latin sources as a son of Dionysos by Aphrodite or some unnamed mother.¹¹⁰ Or else he had been a fine singer of mortal birth who had died on his wedding-day, or before his proper time, or as he was singing at the wedding-feast of Dionysos.¹¹¹ Or, in a fully rationalized account, he was an ordinary Athenian who had died long ago and had come to be commemorated in the wedding-song as a result of the following course of events.

Although exceptionally handsome (so this story relates), Hymenaios was of modest birth, and when he fell in love with an Athenian girl of noble family, all he could do was follow her around to admire her at a distance. One day, as she and her friends were participating in the rites of Demeter at Eleusis, they were snatched away by some pirates, who also seized Hymenaios because he had been trailing his beloved. After the voyage, however, he managed to kill the pirates in their sleep, and made his way back to Athens on his own. On his arrival, he told the citizens about the fate of their missing daughters, and he offered to fetch them back again if he were allowed to marry the one whom he loved. So he fulfilled his pledge and married her; and since the marriage proved to be exceptionally happy, it became the custom to invoke his name at weddings.¹¹² There is mention of a tradition in which an evidently mortal Hymenaios was restored to life by Asclepios, though nothing is recorded of the circumstances;¹¹³ and some said that he was loved by Apollo, or Hesperos (the Evening Star), or Thamyris, or an obscure hero called Argynnos.¹¹⁴ Argos is the only place that is ever mentioned as having a cult of Hymenaios.¹¹⁵

And finally, HERMAPHRODITOS was a bisexual godling who was pictured as having the genitals of a man but the breasts and general build of a woman. His cult was probably derived from the Cypriot cult of Aphroditos, the bearded male Aphrodite, who was honoured in rites in which the men wore female dress and the women male dress; the earliest definite evidence for the cult of Hermaphroditos on the mainland is provided by Attic dedications from the early fourth century BC. Diodorus, who is the first author to refer to him in the surviving literature, describes him as a son of Hermes and Aphrodite,¹¹⁶ an idea that was bound to arise because it is suggested in his name. Although Diodorus seems to assume that he was a hermaphrodite from the time of his birth, Ovid recounts a legend that explains his distinctive form by saying that he had been a handsome young man who had fused with an amorous water-nymph. Hermaphroditos, as he was called after his parents, was reared by naiad nymphs in the caves of Mt Ida in the Troad, but left home at the age of fifteen to wander through Asia Minor. When he reached Caria in the south-west, Salmacis, the nymph of a spring in that area, fell violently in love with him when she saw him approaching her pool. Although the ignorant youth was simply embarrassed when she made direct advances to him, she gained her opportunity when he jumped into her waters to bathe. Seizing him in a tight embrace, she prayed that the two of them should be united forever, and they were fused into a single being who shared the characteristics of both sexes. On observing the change that he had undergone, Hermaphroditos prayed to his divine parents, asking that any man who bathed there in the future should be robbed of his virility. The spring of Salmacis, which lay at Halicarnassus, was credited with these enervating powers in historical times.¹¹⁷ Although this is only proper myth recorded for Hermaphroditos, he appears quite often in the visual arts.

Notes

- 1 Hes. *Theog.* 52–5, 915–7, cf. Alcman 8.9–10, *Hom. Hymn. Hermes* 429, Apollod. 1.3.1, etc.
- 2 D.S. 4.7.1, citing Alcman (= 67 *PMG*) and others unnamed.
- 3 Paus. 9.29.2 citing Mimnermus (= 13 West), schol. A.R. 3.1.
- 4 Hes. *Theog.* 22–34.
- 5 *Ibid.* 36–52.
- 6 Hom. *Il.* 1.1 ('Sing, goddess, of the wrath of Peleus' son Achilles'), and 2.484–93.
- 7 Hom. *Il.* 2.485–6.
- 8 Hes. *Theog.* 75–9, 916–7.
- 9 Hom. *Od.* 24.60.
- 10 Hes. *Theog.* 68.
- 11 For such differentiations, see e.g. schol. A.R. 3.1, *Anth. Pal.* 9, 504 and 505, *Anth. Latin.* 88 and 664, D.S. 4.7.3–4.
- 12 Hom. *Il.* 2.491, 484; Hes. *Theog.* 1–23.
- 13 Hes. *W.D.* 1, *Theog.* 53–5 (born in Pieria), cf. *Theog.* 25, 36ff on Olympian Muses.
- 14 Solon 1.2, Hes. *Shield* 206.
- 15 Paus. 9.29.2 (Heliconian Muses), Plut. *Symp.* 9.14 (Sicyonian; and also referring to three Delphian Muses named Nete, Mese and Hypate); on this question, see also e.g. D.S. 4.7.2, Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 3.47, Serv. *Aen.* 1.12.
- 16 Hom. *Il.* 2.594–600 (599–600 quoted).
- 17 Asclep. 12F10. For the earlier tradition, see also Hes. fr. 65 (Thamyris blinded in Dotian Fields), *Minyas* fr. 4 Davies (T. pays the penalty in Hades for his boast; from Paus. 4.33.7), Eur. *Rhes.* 923–5 (blinded).
- 18 Apollod. 1.3.3.

- 19 Pollux 4.141.
20 Ant. Lib. 9, following Nicander.
21 Ov. *Met.* 5.294–317, 662–78.
22 Paus. 9.34.2, Steph.Byz. s.v. Apterā (contest took place at Apterā in Crete).
23 Ov. *Met.* 5.273–92.
24 All mentioned as children of Muses in Apollod. 1.3.2–4.
25 Hom. *Il.* 5.338, *Od.* 8.359–66.
26 Hom. *Hymn* 5 to *Aphrodite* 58–63.
27 Hes. *Theog.* 60–5.
28 Sappho 53 (invoked on their own), 103, 128 (with Muses); Pi.*Ol.* 14.1–17, 9.26–8, *Nem.* 4.6–8, 9.53–5, *Pyth.* 6.1–3, 9.89–90, etc.; cf. Bacch. 19.1–6, Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 673–5.
29 Hom. *Il.* 14.264–9.
30 Hes. *Theog.* 907–9.
31 Pi. *Ol.* 14.8–9.
32 Hes. *Theog.* 945–6, Hom. *Il.* 18.382–3.
33 Paus. 9.35.1
34 Paus. 9.38.1; the Charites of Orchomenos are invoked in Pi. *Ol.* 14.
35 Hes. *W.D.* 73–5.
36 Hom. *Hymn* 6 to *Aphrodite* 1–15, cf. *Cypria* fr. 4 Davies (garments made for Aphrodite by Horai and Charites).
37 Athenaeus 15.682 d–f.
38 Paus. 9.35.1.
39 Hes. *Theog.* 901–3.
40 Pi. *Ol.* 13.6–8.
41 Hom. *Il.* 5.749–51, 8.393–5.
42 Hom. *Il.* 6.420, *Od.* 13.356, etc.
43 Hom. *Od.* 13.355–60, 17.239–46, 9.154–5. See also *ibid.* 13.102ff for the sacred cave of the nymphs by the shore at Ithaca.
44 Hom. *Il.* 20.7–9.
45 Hes. fr. 304.
46 Hom. *Hymn.* *Aphrodite* 257–72.
47 Schol. Lyc. 480; cf. Eumelus fr. 11 Davies as reported in Apollod. 3.9.1 (that Arcas fathered his two sons by the nymph Chrysopeleia).
48 Schol. A.R. 2.477.
49 A.R. 2.462–79.
50 D.S. 4.84.2–4, Ael. *V.H.* 10.18.
51 Ov. *Met.* 4.276–7, Serv. *Ecl.* 5.20.
52 Theoc. 1.64ff.
53 Hes. fr. 10a.17–9.
54 Pi. fr. 143 Bowra.
55 Arist. Fr.44 Rose (from Plut. *Moralia* 115de), cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.48; caught in the ‘Gardens of Midas’ in Macedonia, Hdt. 8.138; Midas caught ‘the Satyr’ at a spring in Phrygia by mixing wine into it Xen. *Anab.* 1.2.13; in Theopompus 115F75c (as cited in Ael. *V.H.* 3.18), Midas delivers a moral lecture to Midas by telling him of the contrasting ways of life of some imaginary peoples in an imaginary geographical setting.
56 Paus. 6.24.8.
57 Paus. 1.23.6.
58 Ov. *Met.* 11.85–145.
59 Theoc. 1.15–8.
60 See e.g. Paus. 10.23.5–6 (description of Panic terror in war), Polyæn. *Strateg.* 1.2 (Pan as general and tactical innovator); Shepherd-god, lover of music, Hom. *Hymn* 19 to Pan 1–26; Pan *philochoros*, Aesch. *Pers.* 448; his skill on the ‘pan-pipes’, Theoc. 1.2–3, Verg. *Ecl.* 4.56–9, etc.
61 E.g. Cornutus 67.
62 Pl. *Crat.* 408b, Hom. *Hymn.* *Pan* 47.
63 Hom. *Hymn.* *Pan* 27–47.
64 Hdt. 2.145, cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 7.38, Hyg. *Fab.* 224, Lucian *D.D.* 22.2.
65 Apollod. 1.4.1, Ael. *N.A.* 6.42 respectively.
66 Ov. *Met.* 1.689–712, cf. Westermann anon. p. 347; rationalized version, Longus 2.34, Achilles Tatius 8.6 (set near Ephesus with local aetiology).

- 67 Nonnus 42.258ff (simpler version), Liban. *Narrat.* 27 and 28 (version involving Boreas); allusions to the story in Theoc. *Syrinx* 4, Propertius 1.18.20, Lucian *D.D.* 22.4, etc. Pan's pine-crown, Lucretius 4.584–5.
- 68 *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.23; allusions to Pan's love for Echo in Theoc. *Syrinx* 5, Moschus 5.1–4.
- 69 Hdt. 6.105.
- 70 Paus. 1.28.4.
- 71 Plut. *Moralia* 419b.
- 72 Paus. 7.17.5, Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 5.5–7.
- 73 Sallustius *On Gods and Universe* 4.
- 74 Ov. *Fasti* 4.223ff.
- 75 Hes. fr. 10a.17–9.
- 76 Call. *Hymn* 1.51–3, Eur. *Bacch.* 120ff, cf. Apollod. 1.1.6–7, D.S. 5.65.4.
- 77 For translation and discussion, see W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, London, 1950, 46ff.
- 78 Pher. 3F48 (children of Apollo and Rhytia), Apollod. 1.3.4 (of Apollo and the Muse Thalia), Str. 10.3.19 (various).
- 79 Pl. *Laws* 790c–791a.
- 80 Eur. *Bacch.* 120–34.
- 81 Diogenes Laertius 6.59.
- 82 Pher. 3F48, Acus. 2F40.
- 83 Paus. 9.25.6, with evidence from the visual arts and votive inscriptions (referring to Cabeiro and *pais*, i.e. child or son).
- 84 Schol. A.R. 1.917.
- 85 Anonymus Ambrosianus *De. Re. Metr.* 2.6 (in *Analecta Studemundi* 1, p. 224).
- 86 A.R. 1.1129–31 with schol.
- 87 D.S. 5.64.3; five of each sex, Soph. fr. 366 Radt, Str. 10.3.22.
- 88 D.S. 5.64.3, Pher. 3F47.
- 89 *Phoronis* fr. 2 Davies, cf. Hes. fr. 282 (discovered metal-working in Crete), Str. 10.3.22.
- 90 D.S. 17.7.5.
- 91 Ov. *Met.* 4.281–2, Soph. fr. 365 Radt.
- 92 D.S. 5.64.6–7, Paus. 8.31.3.
- 93 Suid. s.v. Telchines.
- 94 D.S. 5.55.3.
- 95 Call. *Hymn* 4.30–1 and Str. 14.2.7 respectively.
- 96 D.S. 5.55.3.
- 97 Str. 14.2.7, Zenob. 5.41.
- 98 Call. fr. 75.64–9, Ov. *Met.* 7.365–7, Serv. *Aen.* 4.377, schol. Stat. *Theb.* 2.274.
- 99 D.S. 5.55.1.
- 100 Paus. 9.22.5.
- 101 Ov. *Met.* 13.917–65.
- 102 Aesch. *Glaukos Pontios*, fr. 25–9 Radt.
- 103 A.R. 1.1310–28, Eur. *Orest.* 362–9.
- 104 Schol. A.R. 1.932; for Hellespontine traditions regarding his birth, see also schol. Theoc. 1.81, Tzetz. *Lyc.* 831.
- 105 Ov. *Fasti* 1.391–440.
- 106 Ibid. *Fasti* 6.319–48.
- 107 Ov. *Met.* 9.340–7.
- 108 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.23.
- 109 Asclep. 12F6, Suid, s.v. Thamyris, schol. Eur. *Rhes.* 342, etc.
- 110 E.g. Seneca *Medea* 110ff, Serv. *Aen.* 4.127 (Dionysos and Aphrodite).
- 111 E.g. Serv. *Aen.* 1.651, Eustath. on *Il.* 18.493, Serv. *Aen.* 4.127 respectively.
- 112 Schol. *Il.* 18.493, Vat. Myth. 1.74.
- 113 Apollod. 3.10.3, citing 'the Orphics'.
- 114 Ant. Lib. 23, Serv. *Ecl.* 8.30, Suid. s.v. Thamyris, Athen. 603d respectively.
- 115 Hyg. *Fab.* 273.
- 116 D.S. 4.6.5.
- 117 Ov. *Met.* 4.285–388; on pool, Str. 14.2.16.

The early mythical history of Argos

In the course of time, Greek heroic mythology came to be ordered into a consistent pseudo-historical pattern by the ancient mythographers. Since it was supposed that most of the main heroes and heroines of legend would have belonged to the royal family of their homeland, the mythical city of each city or land was largely centred around the history of its ruling family, and once a broadly agreed account of the succession had been established in each main kingdom, all the mythical figures and legends associated with the land could be assigned to a specific point in time in relation to the reigns of the successive rulers. Since the leading figures of each kingdom often interacted in legend, moreover, with those of other kingdoms, through war or marriage, for instance, or through joint participation in great adventures, it was necessary that the genealogies of different royal houses should be synchronized with one another (even if this was not always perfectly achieved). On this basis, a remarkably coherent mythical pre-history came to be developed for much of Greece. The process was initiated in early epic, most notably in the *Catalogue of Women* (a genealogical poem of the early sixth century BC traditionally ascribed to Hesiod, see p. 8), and was brought to a high degree of development thereafter by early prose mythographers such as Pherecydes and Hellanicus (see pp. 7 and 12). According to the simplest pattern, a single ruling family would provide the ruling line in a single centre, as in the case of the royal families of Athens and Arcadia, which were both descended from indigenous earth-born ancestors. In general, however, the heroic genealogies tended to be more sophisticated and economical than this, since the mythographers liked to unite different ruling lines within a single family by tracing them back to common ancestors. The royal families of Argos, Thebes, and Crete were thus presented as having been of common descent, and the family of Helen of Sparta was drawn into the same genealogical system as that of the Trojan prince who abducted her. As may be imagined, however, from examples such as these, the process of genealogical systematization became highly artificial at this overarching level, and the mythology of each individual family was left largely unaffected by it.

It may be gathered from all of this that nothing could be less true of Greek heroic mythology than to suppose that it tells of events situated in some vague and indeterminate mythical antiquity. It could be viewed, on the contrary, as forming a special kind of history, and the canon of heroic myth in its fully developed form is

best approached in that way, even if one also has to take due account of how individual myths within it evolved and varied over the course of time, and that many local myths could fall outside this historical pattern. Most significant heroes and heroines and their adventures could be dated to a specific point in time within the heroic era, and the heroic era itself could be placed in a datable relation to the era of conventional history, which was supposed to have begun a few generations after the Trojan War. This mightiest of wars, in which leading heroes from all parts of Greece were said to have joined together in a common enterprise of unparalleled magnitude, was the culminating event of the heroic era, and a relatively short span of time was thought to have elapsed – usually no more than six or seven generations or so – between the time of origin of the various Greek royal lines and the outbreak of the war. The other great Panhellenic adventures, the voyage of the Argonauts and the hunt for the Calydonian boar, were supposed to have taken place a generation or so before the Trojan War, as were the Theban Wars that brought Argos into conflict with Thebes. The Panhellenic adventures, which are thus set at a relatively late period of mythical history, and the main families that were associated with them, will be considered in the second part of our survey of the mythical history of Greece, from [Chapter 16](#) onwards.

During the previous eras of the mythical history of Greece, the two most important centres were Argos, in the north-eastern corner of the Peloponnese, and Thebes, in Boeotia in Central Greece. Both were ruled by branches of the same overarching family, that of the Inachids, although other royal families also came to be established alongside the old Inachid line in the Argolid. Crete also fell under Inachid rule after Europa, who was descended from the Argive princess Io who had wandered away to Egypt, was abducted to the island by Zeus from the land of her birth in Phoenicia. At around the same time the other main branch of the family was established at Thebes by her brother Cadmos. Since the Inachid family was of Argive origin, being descended from Inachos, the god of the greatest river of the Argolid, the Argive branch was the oldest of the three, and had perhaps the longest continuous history of any mythical royal family. So we will begin accordingly with the mythical history of Argos, up until a generation or two before the Trojan War. Two of the greatest heroes of heroic mythology, Perseus and Heracles, belonged to the old Argive royal family, even though circumstances dictated that Heracles should be born elsewhere. Since Heracles spent most of his life outside his ancestral land and his mythology is so exceptionally rich, taking him to many different areas, his career will be examined separately in the next chapter, and the myths of his descendants, the Heraclids, will also require separate treatment. As for the two other main branches of the family that ruled in Crete and Thebes, these will be considered in [Chapters 13](#) and [15](#) to [16](#) respectively.

The first Inachids in Argos and in Egypt and Phoenicia

Phoroneus, the first ruler of Argos, and his immediate descendants

The first ruler of Argos, and perhaps even the first man to be born there, was PHORONEUS, son of Inachos, whose mother was an Oceanid nymph called Melia or Argia.¹ In the *Phoronis*, an archaic epic that recorded the local traditions about him and the earliest history of the land, he was indeed said to have been the first of all mortal men.² He was more a culture-hero than an epic hero in the conventional sense, as the primordial ruler of Argos who was supposed to have introduced the first elements of civilization, and to have established the main cults of the land. In that respect, he was comparable to Pelasgos in Arcadia (see p. 543) or Cecrops in Attica (see p. 318), two other Greek lands whose inhabitants prided themselves on being able to trace their history back to the very beginnings of human civilization.

Just as Athens was noted for its association with Athena, Argos was marked out from other lands by its special association with Hera, who had been the great goddess of Argos from time immemorial, or, in mythical terms, ever since the reign of its first king. As in the case of Athena at Athens, Hera was said to have established herself as patron deity of the land by defeating Poseidon in a contest for it. Phoroneus was appointed as arbitrator, and he chose in favour of Hera after consulting with his father Inachos and also with Cephisos and Asterion, the gods of two other rivers of the province. Poseidon was so enraged that he reduced most of the land to aridity by causing its rivers to run dry for much of the year, so turning it into the ‘thirsty Argos’ of proverb.³ After inviting Hera into Argos in this way, Phoroneus established her cult by honouring her with the first sacrifices that were ever offered to her.⁴ In his function as ruler, he gathered his people together – one should not enquire too anxiously about their origin – into the first settled community, the ‘town of Phoroneus’, *astu Phoronikon*, which would later develop into the great city of Argos.⁵ The Argives went so far as to claim that Phoroneus (rather than Prometheus, see p. 86) had first introduced fire to the human race, hence an eternal flame that was burned in his honour in the temple of Apollo Lycaios in Argos.⁶

Phoroneus married a nymph variously named as Teledice, Cerdo, or Peitho, who bore him a daughter, NIOBE, and perhaps also a son, Apis, who remained childless. Niobe was the first mortal woman to bear a child to Zeus,⁷ and the birth of her child, ARGOS, marked the opening of an era in mythological time that would be brought to an end when Alcmene, a descendant of Niobe in the sixteenth generation, gave birth to the great Heracles, the last child to be borne to Zeus by a mortal woman. Argos, who has no myths at all, was the eponym of the city and land. His tomb and sacred grove could be seen near the city of Argos.⁸

Io is seduced by Zeus, transformed into a cow, and placed under the guard of Argos Panoptes

Argos was succeeded by one of his sons, PEIREN (or Peiras, or Peirasos, or Peiranthos), who was the father of IO in the earliest tradition.⁹ In some later accounts, however, the Argive king-list was lengthened slightly, and Io came to be described as a descendant of Argos in the third or fourth generation, as the daughter of a certain Iasos.¹⁰ Or, conversely, authors such as the Attic tragedians and Ovid,

who were not concerned about the niceties of the local tradition or questions of mythical chronology, ignored all the intervening kings and simply described Io as a daughter of the river-god Inachos.¹¹ This latter genealogy became so familiar, indeed, that authors of the Hellenistic and Roman periods could refer to her as ‘the daughter of Inachos’ without needing to specify her name.

The father of Io (whoever he may have been) appointed her to be the virgin priestess of Argive Hera, but she was so very beautiful that Zeus seduced her, and she came to be transformed as a result into a cow, temporarily at least. In Apollodorus’ account, which may have been largely based on that offered in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, Zeus turned her into a white cow with a touch of his hand when Hera came to learn of their relationship, and then swore to his wife that he had never had intercourse with the girl; and as a result of this divine precedent, so ‘Hesiod’ is said to have remarked, perjuries committed by lovers never draw down any anger from the gods. Hera was in no way deceived, however, by her husband’s action or his protestations, and asked that the cow should be handed over to her. She then placed it under the guard of ARGOS PANOPTES (the All-Seeing), who was ideally suited to serve as a watchman because he never slept and had more than the usual number of eyes.¹² According to Pherecydes, Hera prepared him specifically for his present duties by relieving him of the need to sleep and setting an extra eye in the back of his neck; or in another early account, he had four eyes in all, with two on the back of his neck.¹³ In the subsequent tradition, however, he was usually thought to have had innumerable eyes all over his body, which gives him a most strange and unusual appearance when he is portrayed in vase-paintings. In another version of the story, Hera herself turned Io into a cow to put an end to the love affair, but when Zeus continued to consort with her by assuming the form of a bull, the goddess was obliged to place the cow under the guard of the many-eyed Argos ([Figure 10.1](#)).¹⁴

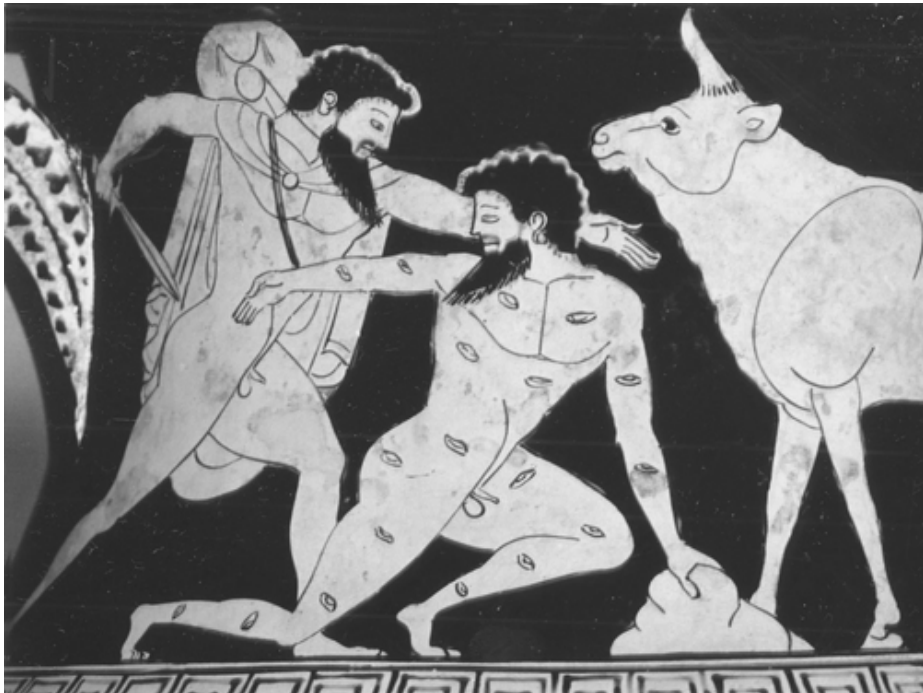


Figure 10.1. Hermes killing Argos Panoptes. Io, on the right, is oddly represented as a bull. Attic red-figure amphora, c. 480 BC. Museum für Kunst und Gerwerbe, Hamburg, Germany.

To return to Apollodorus' narrative, Zeus set to work to gain possession of the cow by ordering Hermes, who was ever adept at thievery, to steal it away from under the eyes of its guard; but when Hermes found that he was unable to get hold of it by stealth, because his intentions were betrayed by a certain Hierax ('Hawk', who may perhaps have been turned into a bird of that kind by way of punishment), he killed Argos instead by hurling a well-aimed stone at him.¹⁵ This part of the story was devised to provide an explanation for Hermes' ancient title of Argeiphontes (of uncertain origin and meaning) by interpreting it as meaning 'Argos-slayer'.¹⁶

Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* offers a singular account of Io's troubles, narrated by the heroine herself. While asleep in her father's palace, she was visited by beguiling dreams, which urged her to go out to the meadows of Lerna (to the south of Argos) to allow Zeus to satisfy the desire that he had come to feel for her. She did not do so, however, and finally summoned up the courage to report the matter to her father Inachos, who sent envoys to the oracles at Delphi and Dodona to ask what he should do. When he finally received a clear response, he was told that he should turn Io out of his house, or else his entire race would be destroyed by a thunderbolt from Zeus. So he did so under force of necessity, and Io was then immediately transformed into a cow and driven to Lerna by a gadfly. In her new form she was followed by Argos until he met with a sudden death, and she was then driven from land to land, much as in the usual story recounted below. The play's account of the events that followed Io's expulsion from the palace is wilfully obscure and we are never told who transformed her (perhaps Zeus rather than Hera in view of the

context), but it is made clear at a later stage that Zeus caused her to become pregnant when she finally arrived in Egypt, and then apparently by a mere touch of his hand.¹⁷

Ovid's relatively late account of these events is picturesque and unproblematic. Hera realized that her husband was up to mischief on observing a patch of darkness that he had spread over the land to conceal his dalliance. As she was hurrying to the spot, Zeus turned Io into a cow to hide her presence, but Hera realized what had happened and asked that the beast should be handed over to her. She then placed it under guard of Argos as in the traditional version summarized above. At this point, however, Ovid adds an attractive detail of his own, by saying that to reassure her father Inachos, who did not recognize her in her new form and feared that she was dead, Io revealed her identity and fate to him by tracing letters in the dust with her hoof. Hermes is presented here as lulling Argos to sleep by playing his reed-pipes (an idea already to be found in Aeschylus), and by passing his magic wand over the monster before proceeding to cut off his head with a sickle.¹⁸

Although it is unlikely that a local monster like Argos Panoptes would have been credited with any specific parentage in the earliest tradition, he is usually fitted into the Argive royal family at some point in surviving accounts, as a son or descendant of Argos, son of Niobe. Pherecydes described him as a son of Arestor and thus a great-grandson of the first Argos. Some followed Acusilaus, on the other hand, in describing him as earth-born.¹⁹ It was said that he liked to wear a bull's hide as a cape, as is stated in a fragment from Sophocles.²⁰ Apollodorus explains its origin by saying that he had taken it from a bull, which had been causing havoc in neighbouring Arcadia, adding that he had once killed a Satyr who had been robbing the Arcadians of their cattle, and had even killed the monstrous Echidna (see p. 56).²¹ Apollonius attributes the building of the *Argo* to an Argos who wore a bull's hide cape, but although this Argos, who is described as a son of Arestor, was evidently modelled on the present Argos, he cannot be identified with him because the Argonauts lived many generations later, and the poet presumably intended that we should regard the builder of the *Argo* as a separate figure who was descended from Argos Panoptes.²²

Moschus, a Hellenistic bucolic poet, is the first author to suggest that the peacock with its many-eyed tail had some connection with Argos, by saying that a peacock sprang up from his blood after his death. According to Ovid, on the other hand, Hera merely took his eyes and set them in the tail of the previously existing bird, although some later authors indicate that he was actually transformed into a peacock.²³ Since the peacock was the special bird of Hera, just as the owl was the bird of Athena, there was double reason for such a connection to be drawn. The name of this Argos remains familiar in modern usage as a title for newspapers (which are supposed to let nothing escape their view) and in the expression 'Argos-eyed'.

Apollodorus may be consulted for an account of the early history of the Argolid that was probably derived from the Argive mythographer Acusilaus (late sixth century BC) for the most part; Pelasgos, the earth-born first man of Arcadia (see p. 543), is here annexed to the Argive royal line as a son of Niobe and brother of Argos.²⁴ Acusilaus also provided Sparta with an Argive eponym in the form of a

brother of Niobe called Sparton (although any Spartan would have been astonished to hear this, as Pausanias remarks).²⁵ Peiren, the traditional father of Io, was an ancient figure with cultic associations; he was said to have erected the first cultic image of Hera, a pear-wood statue that was set up by him at Tiryns but was later transferred to the great Heraion near Mycenae.²⁶

Io wanders away to Egypt, where she is returned to human form and gives birth to Epaphos

On finding her plan to confine the cow in one place had been foiled by Hermes, Hera sent a gadfly against it to ensure that it would now be constantly on the move without a moment's rest. In the final form of the myth, Io wandered all the way to Egypt before finding any relief. Although it is impossible to trace the earlier evolution of the myth in any detail or with much certainty, her wanderings would surely have been confined to the Argolid in the earliest tradition; and it has been plausibly suggested that she would have roamed from the city of Argos to the great Heraion near Mycenae, which was located on a hill known as Euboea. A subsequent version of the story, perhaps originating in Euboea itself, suggested that she travelled considerably further, to the island of Euboea off the east coast of Central Greece; a fragment from the Hesiodic *Aigimios* indicates that she once visited the island and that Zeus named it Euboea (interpreted as meaning 'Good Cow Land') in her honour; and in the later tradition at least, Io was sometimes said to have settled there and to have given birth to Zeus's son in a cave on the island.²⁷ By the classical period, a more extravagant version of story had established itself in which the transformed Io went all the way to Egypt, where Zeus restored her to her original form and so enabled her to give birth to her child. We should imagine her as travelling northwards through Greece, doubtless calling in at Euboea on the way, and then through Thrace and across the Bosporos (i.e. Cow's Strait) into Asia Minor, before passing down through Syria and Phoenicia to her ultimate destination. In *Prometheus Bound*, her itinerary is even more extravagant, taking her to the Caucasus, where she meets the enchained Prometheus, who predicts that her journey will take her across the Cimmerian Bosporos and past the Graiai and Gorgons, and the Arimaspians and Griffins (see p. 573).²⁸ Some claimed that the Ionian Sea (between Greece and lower Italy) was named after her because she had visited its shores during her wanderings.²⁹

When Io arrived in Egypt, Zeus returned her to her proper form, and she gave birth to EPAPHOS, the son whom she had conceived to him, beside the banks of the Nile. It could be explained that he was given this name because Zeus had delivered his mother from her animal form with a touch (*epaphē*) of his hand, or had rendered her pregnant with a mere touch.³⁰ Io came to be identified with the Egyptian goddess Isis, although there is no definite evidence for this until the Hellenistic period, and her son Epaphos was identified with Apis, the bull-god who was worshipped at Memphis, as Herodotus already records.³¹ In a relatively late myth, which was obviously inspired by the Egyptian myth of Isis' search for the lost Osiris, the Couretes are said to have stolen the infant Epaphos at the bidding of Hera,

causing the unfortunate Io to set off on her travels once again; she roamed northwards through Syria in search of him until she finally discovered him at Byblos, a coastal city to the north of Sidon, where she was being tended by the wife of the king. The Couretes, who seem ill-suited to this role as former protectors of the infant Zeus (see p. 69), were presumably inserted here in place of some Egyptian deities. We are told that Zeus killed them by way of punishment. After recovering her son, Io returned to Egypt, where she married Telegonos, the king of the Egyptians who adopted Epaphos as his successor.³²

The immediate descendants of Io in Egypt and Phoenicia, and the dividing of the Inachid line

In the Greek tradition, Epaphos was the great city-founder of early Egypt. He is already mentioned in this connection by Pindar, who refers to ‘the numerous cities founded in Egypt by the hand of Epaphos’; and Hyginus reports correspondingly that Zeus ordered him to fortify the cities of Egypt and reign there, and that he founded Memphis and many other towns.³³ Although Hyginus names his wife as Cassiopeia, it was commonly thought that he married Memphis, a daughter of the Nile, and founded the great city of Memphis in Lower Egypt in her name.³⁴ Memphis bore him a daughter who was of still greater significance as an eponym, namely LIBYE, who gave her name to the African territories to the west of Egypt (a much broader area than the modern Libya).³⁵ Poseidon abducted Libye and fathered twin sons by her, BELOS, who remained in Egypt and succeeded Epaphos as king, and AGENOR, who departed to Phoenicia to found a kingdom of his own.³⁶

At this point the Inachid family, formed from the descendants of the god of the greatest river in Argos, divides into two branches that will have wholly separate histories, because the descendants of Belos will go back to Argos, their ancestral home, whereas the children of Agenor will settle elsewhere, in Crete, Boeotia, and other places. For when Agenor’s daughter Europa was subsequently abducted to Crete by Zeus, he sent his sons in search of her, telling them never to return if they should fail to find her, as would turn out to be the case; and his most notable son, Cadmos, thus settled in Boeotia in Central Greece, as founder of Thebes and of the Theban royal family (see pp. 331ff), while Europa bore Minos to Zeus in Crete and so became the founder of the Inachid ruling family of the island (see pp. 287ff).³⁷ We will concentrate on Belos’ branch of the Inachid family in this chapter and the next, so as to trace the subsequent mythical history of Argos and to consider the lives of two great heroes, Perseus and Heracles, who will be born into this line, before returning to Agenor’s side of the family in [Chapters 13, 15, and 16](#).

Danaos returns to Argos with his daughters, the Danaids

The Danaids flee to Argos to try to escape their suitors, the sons of Aigyptos

BELOS is of genealogical significance alone. His name is simply a Hellenized form of

the Semitic word Baal (meaning Lord), a title that was applied to local presiding gods in the Near East. He succeeded to the Egyptian throne and married Anchinoë, daughter of the Nile, who bore him twin sons, DANAOS and AIGYPTOS.³⁸ Cepheus and Phineus, the father and uncle of Andromeda (see p. 227), are also classed as sons of Belos in some accounts³⁹ (but see also on p. 332); and, according to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, he had a daughter Thronie who bore Arabos, the eponym of the Arabs, to Hermes.⁴⁰

Aigyptos was of course the eponym of the Egyptians (Aigyptoi in Greek). According to Apollodorus, he was installed in Arabia by his father while Danaos was installed in Libya, but he later conquered the land of the Melampodes (Blackfeet, presumably Egyptians who were not already under the rule of his father) and named it Egypt after himself. He and Danaos fathered large families by many different women in a manner that was more eastern than Greek, Aigyptos fathering fifty sons, and Danaos fifty daughters who were known as the DANAIDS (DANAIDES). The two brothers eventually quarrelled because Aigyptos was determined to marry his sons to the Danaids, a scheme that was repugnant to Danaos because it would mean that his family would be absorbed into that of his brother, and his own position would be greatly weakened as a consequence. According to a surviving fragment from the *Danaïd*, an early epic that was devoted to the legend of Danaos, the Danaids went so far as to arm themselves by the banks of the Nile, evidently with the intention of resisting their cousins by force.⁴¹ In accordance with a suggestion from Athena, Danaos tried to escape from this difficulty by building a large fifty-oared ship and fleeing to Argos with his daughters. Some claimed that this was the first large seagoing ship ever to be constructed; and although that honour was more commonly credited to the *Argo* (see p. 339), the legend of Danaos is certainly set at an earlier period in mythical history.⁴² In further explanation of his flight, it was sometimes stated that he had received an oracle warning him that he would be killed by one of the sons of Aigyptos if they should marry his daughters.⁴³

After stopping off at Lindos on Rhodes, where the Danaids founded the temple of Athena and their father dedicated a statue to the goddess,⁴⁴ they arrived at Argos, which was now under the rule of GELANOR, son of Sthenelas. As the leading member of another branch of the Inachid ruling family, Gelanor had a legitimate claim to the throne, but he agreed to abdicate in favour of Danaos either of his own free will or in obedience to a sign from the gods. A local version of the story is recorded in the cultic legend that was devised to explain the origin of the shrine of Apollo Lycaios at Argos. When Danaos arrived to claim the kingdom, the citizens of Argos listened patiently to his arguments and those of Gelanor but found that the issue seemed so evenly balanced (as it might well have been on the main criterion of descent) that they deferred their decision until the next day. The matter was resolved on their behalf, however, by a sign from the gods; for at dawn on the following morning, a wolf suddenly broke into a herd of cattle that was grazing just outside the city walls, and killed the leading bull; and the Argives interpreted this as a portent that indicated that the newcomer (as represented in the wolf) should displace the present ruler (as represented in the bull). Believing that Apollo had sent the wolf (*lykos*), Danaos expressed his gratitude by founding the cult of Apollo Lycaios (here

interpreted as meaning Apollo of the Wolves). He also founded Larisa, the citadel of Argos, and gave his name to his subjects, who were known thenceforth as Danaans rather than Pelasgians as previously.⁴⁵

Danaos incites his daughters to murder the sons of Aigyptos on their wedding-night

Refusing to be deterred by the flight of their cousins, the sons of Aigyptos soon arrived in Argos to press their suit. They assumed a conciliatory tone, inviting Danaos to abandon his enmity and consent to a union between the two families; but he mistrusted them, and bore them a grudge besides because he had been forced to flee from his original kingdom. So he mollified them by pretending to agree to the marriages and cast lots to assign each of his daughters to a specific bridegroom. When the time came for the wedding, however, he secretly provided his daughters with daggers and instructed them to kill their husbands while they were asleep on their wedding-night. They all obeyed him with the sole exception of Hypermnestra (or Hypermestra), who spared her husband Lynceus (see below, p. 219).⁴⁶

According to Apollodorus, Athena and Hermes purified the Danaids from their crime at the order of Zeus, and Danaos subsequently married them off by awarding them to the victors of an athletic contest.⁴⁷ This story of the contest must have been fairly ancient because it was known to Pindar, and the detail about the divine purification was probably at least as old, since something of the kind would have been necessary if the Danaids were to be marriageable after committing such a crime. As Pindar tells the story, Danaos found new husbands for forty-eight of his daughters (i.e. all except Hypermnestra and Amyclone, see below, p. 219) before noon on a single day by lining them up at the finishing-line of a race track and causing their suitors to race for them. The suitors evidently made their choice in the order in which they completed the race, perhaps by touching their chosen bride when they did so.⁴⁸ In a later version recorded by Pausanias, in which the story has lost its naivety and has even acquired a comical edge, the young men of the time were unwilling to marry the Danaids on account of their guilt until Danaos offered to give them away without demanding a bride-price. When some suitors arrived, though not very many, he organized a foot-race to determine their order of choice; and the girls who were left over had to await the arrival of further suitors and another race.⁴⁹ According to a well-known story from the later tradition, the Danaids were punished forever in the world below by being forced to attempt the impossible task of fetching water in leaky jars, or filling a leaky cistern.⁵⁰ As has already been observed, this motif of futile water-carrying was originally devised to illustrate the posthumous predicament of those who had failed to have themselves initiated into the mysteries, and the task was transferred to the Danaids at some stage in the Hellenistic period (for good symbolic reasons, see pp. 110–11).

The massacre was said to have been committed at Lerna, a marshy region lying by the Argolic Gulf, a few miles south of the city of Argos, famous in myth as the home of the hydra that was killed by Heracles as his second labour (see p. 254). This was where the sons of Aigyptos had set up their camp. After they were murdered,

their heads were buried separately from the rest of their bodies. According to Pausanias, who was writing on the basis of direct knowledge of the local memorials, the Danaids chopped off their heads after their death to take these trophies to their father in Argos as proof that they had killed them.⁵¹ This story has its own grisly logic, and Apollodorus may simply have been mistaken in stating that their heads were buried at Lerna while their bodies were buried in front of the city.⁵² The proverbial expression 'a Lerna of evils' was explained, moreover, by the fact that the sons of Aigyptos were said to have been buried there.⁵³

As for Aigyptos himself, he was usually said to have stayed behind in Egypt when his sons pursued the Danaids to Argos; but the early tragic poet Phrynichos represented him as travelling to Greece with his sons, and Pausanias records a local tradition from Patrai, a city on the northern coast of the Peloponnese, in which Aigyptos was said to have fled there in horror at the murder of his sons, so as to be finally buried there in a tomb, which could be seen in historical times.⁵⁴

The Danaid Amydone is seduced by Poseidon, and bears him a son, Nauplios

Two of the Danaids alone escaped the guilt of murder, Hypermnestra because she spared her husband and AMYDONE because she was unable to marry, having become pregnant beforehand in the following circumstances. On arriving in Argos, Danaos had found that there was a shortage of water and had sent his daughters in search of further supplies; and Amydone had wandered to the above-mentioned district of Lerna. By contrast to most of 'thirsty Argos', this was a well-watered region with permanent springs, streams, and marshlands, and it was explained that it owed its abundant water to Amydone (in part at least) because she encountered Poseidon there and he rewarded her for her favours by creating a spring or springs with a blow of his trident. A Satyr is involved in all the fullest accounts, in accordance with a version developed by Aeschylus, who wrote a Satyr-play about Amydone to complement his Danaid trilogy. In the course of her journey through the Argolid, Amydone threw her hunting-spear at a deer, but happened to hit a sleeping Satyr instead; he leapt up and tried to rape her, but she was saved by the intervention of Poseidon, who scared the Satyr away and proceeded to seduce her, and rewarded her afterwards by revealing or creating the springs of Lerna.⁵⁵ Or, in a slightly different version, the Satyr set out to rape her when she fell asleep from exhaustion, but Poseidon scared him off by hurling his trident, which became embedded in a rock; after winning her favours, he told her that she would gain her reward if she pulled the trident out of the rock, and three springs of water gushed forth when she did so (one for each prong).⁵⁶ This legend explained the origin of the spring of Amydone at Lerna, which gave rise to a sizeable stream of the same name.

By creating this new source of water, Poseidon made partial amends for having deprived Argos of most of its water long ago after he was defeated by Hera in a contest for the land (see p. 128). Lerna was richly provided with water because its springs were fed by underground channels from Arcadia; there were marshes there, too, which had been the home of the Lernaian hydra, and a bottomless lake that

communicated with the Underworld (see p. 99).⁵⁷ Amymone was also supposed to have discovered a well at the city of Argos, as were three of her sisters; the services that were performed by the Danaids in this regard were already noted in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*.⁵⁸

As the result of her liaison with Poseidon, Amymone gave birth to a son, NAUPLIOS (Seafarer), who founded the city of Nauplia (later Nauplion) in the north-eastern corner of the Argolic Gulf.⁵⁹ He used this city, which served as the seaport of Tiryns, as his home-port during his long career as a seafarer. His legends fall into two groups, those in which rulers asked him to dispose of their daughters for different reasons (see pp. 304 and 423), and those in which he took action against the Greeks who had fought at Troy (see pp. 498 and 503) to avenge the murder of his son Palamedes at Troy (see p. 472). Ancient authors ascribe all these stories to the same person even though this would mean that he must have lived for many generations; Apollodorus notes the point by remarking that he was long-lived (*makrobios*, perhaps as a privilege granted to him by his divine father, as in the case of Sarpedon, see p. 300). Apollonius and some subsequent authors mention a later Nauplios who was a descendant of the original in the fifth generation, but only as a skilled seaman who sailed with the Argonauts;⁶⁰ there is no indication in surviving sources that the Nauplios who acted against the Greeks after the Trojan War was ever identified with this other Nauplios, son of Klytoneos, rather than the earlier son of Poseidon and Amymone.

In the *Returns*, an early epic in the Trojan cycle, the wife of Nauplios was apparently a certain Philyra, but in tragedy and later sources she is always Clymene, a daughter of Catreus, king of Crete,⁶¹ whom he came to marry in circumstances recounted on p. 304. The couple had one son of major importance, Palamedes, an ingenious inventor who met an ignominious death at Troy through the machinations of Odysseus (see pp. 471–2), and two other sons of lesser note, Oiax (see p. 499) and Nausimedon.⁶²

The Danaid Hypermnestra saves her husband Lynceus, and bears him a son, Abas

The only Danaid marriage to last beyond the wedding-day was that of HYPERMNESTRA, who spared her husband LYNCEUS because she was grateful to him for not forcing himself on her during their wedding-night, or because she conceived an immediate love for him.⁶³ On learning from her of Danaos' plot, he took flight to Lyrceia, a settlement high up on a hillside a few miles to the north-west of Argos, and lit a beacon to let Hypermnestra know that he had escaped unharmed; and she lit one in response on Larisa, the acropolis of the city of Argos, to show that she too was safe. This legend furnished an explanation for the origin of an annual festival of beacons that was celebrated in Argos.⁶⁴ Danaos was so angered by Hypermnestra's disobedience that he had her imprisoned, or even went so far as to bring her to trial, alleging that she had placed his own life in danger by allowing Lynceus to escape, and had made the disgrace all the worse for her sisters and himself by taking no part in the crime; but she was acquitted by the citizens of

Argos, and commemorated her victory by dedicating a statue of Aphrodite Nikephoros (Bringer of Victory) in the city and by founding a sanctuary of Artemis Peitho (of Persuasion).⁶⁵ Danaos finally relented as time passed by and his anger subsided, and he agreed to accept Lynceus as his son-in-law and heir.⁶⁶ Or, in a less favoured version, Lynceus took matters into his own hands and seized power by killing Danaos.⁶⁷ He succeeded Danaos as king in any case, and was succeeded in his turn by his son ABAS, who shared equally in the blood of Danaos and Aigyptos.⁶⁸

It was said that Lynceus happened to be in the temple of Hera in Argos when Abas arrived with the news of Danaos' death. When he looked around for a gift to give to his son in memory of the occasion, his eyes fell on a shield that Danaos had carried during his youth and had later dedicated in the temple; so he took it down and gave it to Abas, and also founded the quinquennial games known as the Shield of Argos, at which the victors were awarded a shield as a prize.⁶⁹ Shields were something of an Argive speciality, but the mythographers disagree on whether the distinctive round shields of the land were invented by Danaos himself, or by his grandson Abas, or his great-grandsons Proitos and Acrisios.⁷⁰ The tomb of Danaos could be seen in the marketplace at Argos, not far from the joint tomb of Lynceus and Hypermnestra.⁷¹ Abas married Aglaia, daughter of Mantineus, who bore him twin sons, Proitos and Acrisios.⁷² Some authors identified this Abas with the Euboean ruler of the same name (see p. 440), explaining that this son of Lynceus finally left Argos to conquer Euboea.⁷³

Proitos and Acrisios, and the arrival of Bellerophon and Melampous

Proitos and Acrisios, the twin sons of Abas, go to war and divide the kingdom

In myth and folklore, twins tend to be presented either as the closest of friends or as the fiercest of enemies. PROITOS and ACRISIOS for their part fought with one another even while they were still inside their mother's womb, and quarrelled over the kingdom after their father's death, resorting to arms to settle the issue.⁷⁴ According to the local tradition in the Argolid, they met in battle a few miles east of Argos by the road to Epidaurus, but their two armies proved to be so evenly matched that they were obliged to negotiate a compromise. So Acrisios, as the first-born, took power at the ancestral capital of Argos, while Proitos founded a new centre of rule at Tiryns, on a rocky hill in the Argive plain a few miles to the south-east of Argos. The reputed site of the battle was marked in historical times by a pyramidal monument with relief sculptures of Argive shields on the side; it was often said that the brothers invented these distinctive round shields during the conflict, making them either from wood or from bronze. The fight was commemorated in an annual Argive festival known as the Daulis.⁷⁵

In a more elaborate account of the feud, as recorded by Apollodorus, Proitos was initially defeated and expelled by Acrisios, who agreed to the above-mentioned

compromise only after Proitos had evened the odds by acquiring support from abroad. For when he was forced into exile, he sought refuge with Iobates, king of Lycia, in the south-western corner of Asia Minor; and Iobates not only gave him his daughter Stheneboia in marriage, but also helped to restore him to his own land by providing him with a force of Lycian troops. With the aid of these new-found allies, Proitos established a foothold in the Argolid by occupying the hilltop at Tiryns, and compelled his brother to share the land with him. So Proitos ruled at Tiryns, which was fortified for him by the Cyclopes (see p. 24), while Acrisios ruled at Argos.⁷⁶ Proitos had Lycian connections from a very early period, since the *Iliad* already mentions that his wife (here called Anteia) was the daughter of a Lycian king.⁷⁷ A choral ode by Bacchylides provides the earliest surviving account of his conflict with Acrisios, telling how the relentless feud between the two brothers, ‘which sprang up from a small beginning’, caused such misery to the people of Argos that they finally lost patience and appealed to the pair to divide the land into two.⁷⁸

Bellerophon is sent to his death by Proitos, but survives some ordeals in Lycia, and dies while trying to fly up to heaven on Pegasus

Proitos fathered a single son, Megapenthes, by his wife Stheneboia, and three daughters, Lysippe, Iphinoe, and Iphianassa.⁷⁹ During his reign at Tiryns, he became involved in two unhappy episodes, one that came about because his wife made a false accusation against a guest, and the other because his daughters (or the women of Argos more generally) were struck by madness.

The unfortunate guest was BELLEROPHON, a grandson of Sisyphos, king of Corinth, whose career may be fittingly considered in the present context not only because of his fateful encounter with Proitos, but also because he was a monster-slaying hero of comparable nature to Acrisios’ grandson Perseus. He was generally thought to have been the only son of Glaucos, the son and successor of Sisyphos, although there was also an early tradition that suggested that Poseidon was his true father (see further on p. 555). While still a young man he had to leave Corinth forever because he accidentally killed a variously named brother of his, or else a certain Belleros, a supposed ruler of Corinth who was plainly invented to enable Bellerophon’s name to be interpreted as meaning ‘Belleros-slayer’.⁸⁰ He sought refuge at Tiryns with Proitos, who purified him and welcomed him to his court. Trouble arose, however, when the king’s wife (who is called Anteia rather than Stheneboia in the earliest account of this episode in the *Iliad*) conceived a passion for the young stranger and tried to seduce him. When she found herself rejected, her desire turned to fury, and she told her husband that he had tried to force himself on her. Although Proitos believed her story, he was reluctant to exact vengeance in person against a guest whom he had purified, and so sent him away to his father-in-law Iobates in Lycia with a sealed tablet or letter asking that he should be put to death.

As Homer recounts the tale, the king of Lycia (here unnamed) entertained him on his arrival for nine days, slaughtering nine cows, and finally questioned him at dawn on the tenth day, asking to see the message that he had brought. On discovering

what Proitos was asking of him, he ordered Bellerophon to kill the CHIMAIRA, a fire-breathing monster that was thought to be invincible. Homer describes it as being like a lion in front, a dragon behind, and a goat (*chimaira*, hence its name) in the middle; in subsequent depictions, it resembles a lion in its basic form, but has a snake in place of a tail, and a goat's head projecting from the middle of its back. Bellerophon proceeded to kill it, trusting in signs from the gods. The king then contrived two further ordeals for him, by sending him out against the Solymoi, a belligerent people of the area, and the Amazons, female warriors who were a match for any man; but he returned safe in each case after slaughtering the enemy, and the king subjected him to a final ordeal by picking out a chosen band of warriors from throughout his land. When Bellerophon killed them one and all, Iobates realized that he must be the intrepid offspring of some god and offered him his (unnamed) daughter in marriage along with a share of the kingdom.⁸¹ Bellerophon fathered three children by his Lycian wife, a daughter, Laodameia, and two sons, Glaucos and Isandros. Laodameia bore a notable child to Zeus, namely Sarpedon, who commanded the Lycians as allies of Troy during the Trojan War (see p. 574), with the afore-mentioned Glaucos as his second-in-command. Isandros for his part met an early death while fighting against the Solymoi. Things turned out badly for Bellerophon in the end, so Homer tells us, because he came to be hated by all the gods for some unspecified reason, 'and he went wandering alone over the Aleian plain [i.e. Plain of Wandering], eating his heart out, shunning the paths of men'.⁸²

In the later literature Bellerophon's wife is named as Philonoe or Anticleia, and in all post-Homeric accounts he is said to have ridden out against the Chimaira on the back of Pegasos, a winged immortal horse who was brought to birth by the Gorgon Medusa in a most remarkable way as offspring of Poseidon (see p. 54). According to Pindar, Bellerophon had initially found Pegasos hard to tame and had consulted the seer Polyidos (see p. 302), who told him to sleep overnight in the shrine of Athena in Corinth. The goddess then appeared to him in his sleep and told him to accept a bridle from her to use on Pegasos, and to sacrifice a white bull to his father Poseidon (here regarded as the hero's father) as a tamer of horses; and when he woke up, he found a wonderful golden-banded bridle lying beside him, and employed it to good effect.⁸³ Or, in another account, Athena tamed Pegasos on Bellerophon's behalf by placing a bit in the horse's mouth;⁸⁴ or else he captured Pegasos as he was drinking at the spring of Peirene at Corinth, or received him as a gift from his father Poseidon.⁸⁵ However Bellerophon came to possess him, he made good use of Pegasos to defeat his enemies by riding out against them from above.

According to a lost play by Euripides, the *Stheneboia*, Bellerophon returned to the Argolid after surviving his ordeals to exact revenge on Stheneboia, which he achieved by somehow inducing her to climb on to Pegasos with him and then pushing her off while they were flying high above the Aegean near Melos. It was also suggested that she took her own life after learning that he had survived.⁸⁶

Bellerophon for his own part did not survive to grow old, because he became presumptuous as a result of his triumphs and tried to fly up to Olympos on Pegasos to join the gods. According to Pindar, the horse threw him off and he fell to his death, or else he slipped off because he grew giddy when he looked down.⁸⁷ Or, in

an alternative account, which was devised to explain the sad fate that Homer presented Bellerophon as having suffered at the end of his life, Zeus sent a gadfly against the horse in anger at his presumption, but he survived the resulting fall and was thrown to the ground in Lycia, where he wandered around in misery ever afterwards.⁸⁸ The story of his fall could also be used to explain the origin of the constellation Pegasus (then simply known as the Horse), for it could be said that Pegasos continued on his way after Bellerophon fell off and can still be seen in the heavens as this constellation, or that Zeus established him there as the constellation.⁸⁹

Proitos summons the seer Melampous when his daughters or the Argive women are struck by madness; how Melampous acquired his powers and won a wife for his brother Bias

If the preceding episode perhaps caused Proitos to lose his wife, the second of these episodes undoubtedly caused him to have to share his kingdom with two newcomers, and thus had lasting implications for the dynastic history of the Argolid. For this is the story that tells how the great seer Melampous came to Argos to assist Proitos, and won shares of the kingdom for himself and for his brother Bias, by delivering his daughters (or other women of the land) from an attack of madness. We must trace the earlier history of the two brothers before attempting to disentangle the conflicting traditions that came to be associated with these cures.

MELAMPOUS and BIAS, who were of Deucalionid descent (see p. 379), were born in Messenia to Amythaon, a son of Cretheus, king of Iolcos (see p. 397), who had left his northern birthplace to settle in the south-western region of the Peloponnese. Melampous became the finest seer of his age after acquiring his prophetic powers in the following way as a young man. While he was living in the Messenian countryside outside Pylos, his servants killed some snakes, which had made their home in an oak tree outside his house; and on learning of this, he gathered some wood to cremate the dead beasts and took care of their young. When the latter were fully grown, they came up to Melampous while he was asleep one night and licked his ears with their tongues, giving him the power to understand the speech of birds and other animals. He woke up in a fright, but discovered at once that he could interpret the cries of the birds in the sky above him; and from that time onwards, he was able to foretell the future to his fellow mortals.⁹⁰ Or, in a slightly different account, a snake crept forward and killed a servant while Melampous was attending a sacrifice at the court of a certain Polyphates; and when the king responded by killing the snake, Melampous buried it and took care of its young with the same consequences as above.⁹¹ Melampous also acquired divinatory skills of a more technical kind by learning how to interpret the entrails of sacrificial animals, and apparently received some instruction too from Apollo, the god of prophecy, when Melampous once encountered him beside the river Alpheios.⁹²

The interpretation of the flights, cries, and other behaviour of birds played an important part in technical (as opposed to inspired) divination, and a mythical expression of that can be found in the preceding tale, in which the seer is presented

as learning to understand the language of birds (and other animals) in a literal sense, and so becoming able to acquire hidden knowledge from them. It is understandable that snakes, as uncanny beasts that creep into crevices in the earth, should have come to be associated with divination and prophecy, and they appear in a variety of contexts in tales of the mythical diviners. Cassandra and her brother Helenos, for instance, were said to have acquired their prophetic powers in much the same way as Melampous⁹³ (in one account at least, see p. 148); the seer Polyidos learned how revive a dead child by observing the actions of a snake (see p. 302), the seer Teiresias underwent his changes of sex as a result of encounters with snakes (see p. 365); and Iamos, the founder of a clan of seers at Olympia, was fed by snakes when he was exposed as an infant (see p. 549).

Before setting off from Argos to assist Proitos, Melampous used his special powers to procure a wife for his brother Bias, who had fallen in love with Pero, the only daughter of Neleus, who ruled much of Messenia at that time (see p. 451). She had so many suitors that her father exploited the matter to his own advantage, by promising her to the one who would bring him the cattle of Phylacos, the king of Phylace in Thessaly; and since Bias knew that this would be a very hazardous task because the cattle were guarded by a fierce dog that neither man nor beast could approach, he sought the assistance of Melampous, who agreed to perform the task on his behalf. Before setting off, the seer prophesied that he would be caught in the act as he tried to steal the cattle, but that he would gain possession of them nonetheless after suffering a year's imprisonment. He was arrested just as he had foreseen, and when the year had almost passed, he heard some wood-worms talking together in the roof of his cell; when one of them asked how much of the roof beam had been eaten away, another replied that very little was left. He hastily informed his jailers, asking them to remove him to another cell; and as soon as they had done so, the roof of his former cell collapsed.

On learning of these events, Phylacos realized that his prisoner must be gifted with exceptional powers. So he offered Melampous his freedom and the cattle besides if he could find a cure for his son IPHICLOS, who was afflicted with impotence. For one day, as he had been gelding some rams, Phylacos had seen his son misbehaving in some unspecified way and had chased after him with the bloodied knife in his hand, causing him such a fright that he had become impotent. Melampous soon discovered the cause of the impotence from a vulture, which told him that he could achieve a cure if he scraped some rust from the knife into some water and gave it to the young man to drink for ten days. The vulture informed him, furthermore, that Phylacos had thrust the knife into the bark of a sacred oak tree (or a wild pear tree), and that the bark had grown over it since. Melampous sought out the knife and worked a cure in accordance with the vulture's advice; and Phylacos gave him the cattle as he had promised. After driving them south to Pylos, the seer handed them over to Neleus, who then allowed Bias to marry his daughter.⁹⁴

How Melampous won shares of Proitos' kingdom for himself and Bias by curing his daughters or the Argive women of madness

We now come to the story that is our main concern in the present context, the tale of how Melampous came to Argos to help Proitos, and won shares of the kingdom for himself and his brother by delivering Proitos' daughters from an attack of madness, or by delivering the women of Argos from a more general attack of madness, or else by curing the princesses and the other women too. There can be few episodes in Greek myth in which the tradition is more complex and inconsistent, and it would seem that this came about because there were originally two separate madness legends, set at different periods, in which case Melampous would presumably have been associated with one story alone in the earliest tradition.

To start with Pherecydes' version, which was probably quite ancient, Hera afflicted the daughters of Proitos with madness because they had mocked the poverty of her Argive temple, saying that their father's palace was more splendid by far. After their madness had endured for ten years, Proitos sought the help of Melampous, promising him a share of the kingdom and one of the maidens as a wife if he could effect a cure; and the seer achieved it by appeasing Hera with supplications and sacrifices.⁹⁵ Although there is no mention of Bias in the surviving summary, it is likely enough that Melampous shared his prize with him as in the standard tradition. The early Argive mythographer Acusilaus stated likewise that the girls were sent mad by Hera because they had disparaged the wooden cultic image (*xoanon*) of the goddess.⁹⁶ According to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, however, the madness was inflicted on them by Dionysos to punish them for rejecting his rites; although the details have been lost, they were presented as having behaved in a wanton manner during their madness (perhaps by wandering around wholly or partially unclothed as in some vase-paintings), and their bodies were covered with scabs and their hair dropped out.⁹⁷

Herodotus offers a wholly different version of the story, stating that the Argives fetched Melampous from Pylos when the women of the land were once afflicted by a general outbreak of madness; but when he demanded half of the land as his fee for the cure, they regarded the claim as outrageous and dispensed with his services. Later, however, when still more of the women caught the disease, they approached him once again, saying that they were willing to accept his terms. Now that the situation had altered in his favour, he demanded even more from them, refusing to act until they agreed to give Bias a share of the kingdom also. Herodotus does not say who was ruling in Argos at the time, nor does he explain the cause of the madness.⁹⁸ According to Diodorus, there was an outbreak of madness of this kind during the reign of Proitos' grandson, Anaxagoras, son of Megapenthes; and it was inflicted by Dionysos and cured by Melampous, who received two-thirds of the kingdom as his reward and shared it with Bias.⁹⁹ Since Pausanias also states that this general outbreak took place in the time of Anaxagoras,¹⁰⁰ it can be assumed with some certainty that this was a wholly different legend from that of the madness of the daughters of Proitos; and, in all probability, the women of Argos were originally said to have been sent mad by Dionysos, perhaps because his rites had been rejected in Argos, while the daughters of Proitos were sent mad by Hera because of their well-specified offence against her.

As to the further question as to which of the two stories Melampous was

originally associated with, the lyric poet Bacchylides (died mid-fifth century BC) offered a version of the story of the daughters of Proitos in which Proitos contrived a cure by his own initiative, by vowing a sacrifice of fifty red-haired cattle to Artemis, who then interceded with Hera to ensure that the girls were relieved of their madness.¹⁰¹ But in view of the early evidence for Melampous' involvement in the story, it cannot be said that this was necessarily the original version, and it remains possible that he was transferred from this story to the other.

We can conclude with Apollodorus' account of the legend, which is clearly a composite version. When the daughters of Proitos were driven mad, either by Hera or by Dionysos (for both possibilities are indicated), they roamed through Arcadia and the rest of the Peloponnese in a state of complete abandon. Although Melampous offered to cure them in return for a third of the kingdom, Proitos considered this to be exorbitant and refused to pay; but when the other women went mad also, abandoning their homes and even killing their own children, Proitos agreed to pay the stipulated fee. Melampous now asked for more, however, demanding a third of the kingdom for Bias too. As soon as his terms were accepted, Melampous set off with the most vigorous of the young men of Argos to drive the women out of the wilds with shouts and ecstatic dancing. One of the three daughters of Proitos died in the course of the proceedings, but the others were purified and cured along with the rest of the women.¹⁰²

Proitos named his son Megapenthes (Great Sorrow) in commemoration of the anguish that was caused to him by the madness of his daughters. Megapenthes succeeded to his father's kingdom, but later agreed to exchange it for that of Perseus, the grandson of Acrisios (see p. 228). Proitos' branch of the family next rose into prominence in connection with the Theban wars, and its subsequent history will thus be considered in that context, see pp. 354ff.

Although Proitos had only two daughters named Lysippe and Iphianassa in the account ascribed to Pherecydes, Apollodorus adds a third, named Iphinoe (probably in accord with the Hesiodic *Catalogue*), and most other sources agree that there were three even if there is less agreement about their names. Apollodorus reports that Melampous married Iphianassa (as does Pherecydes) while Lysippe became the wife of Bias and Iphinoe died in the chase. The latter marriage is of little significance, however, since Bias' children and heirs are always said to have been borne to him by Pero. In Diodorus' account, in which Melampous is said to have won his bride by curing the women of Argos during the reign of Anaxagoras, he married Iphianeira, a daughter of Megapenthes and sister of Anaxagoras.¹⁰³

The royal lines founded by Melampous and Bias were destined to play a prominent role in the subsequent history of the land, providing most of the Argive leaders during the Theban Wars;

Perseus and his immediate descendants

*Danae bears Perseus to Zeus, and is set adrift with him by her father
Acrisios*

As for Acrisios, the estranged brother of Proitos, he married Eurydice, the daughter of Lacedaimon, king of Sparta, who bore him a daughter, DANAE, but failed to give birth to any male children. When he consulted the Delphic oracle about his lack of an heir, he was told that he would never father a male child, but that his daughter would give birth to a son who would kill him. In the hope of preventing her from ever coming into contact with men, he built an underground chamber of bronze in the courtyard of his palace and imprisoned her in it along with her nurse.¹⁰⁴ Or, in an alternative version that first appears in Horace and Ovid, he imprisoned her in a bronze tower.¹⁰⁵ His precautions achieved nothing, however, because Zeus fell in love with her and slipped down through the roof into her lap in the form of a shower of gold, causing her to conceive a mighty son, PERSEUS.¹⁰⁶

On hearing the sound of Perseus' voice as he was playing in the underground chamber at the age of three or four, Danaos sent his servants to investigate, and they brought Danae up to the light together with her infant son and nurse. The king put the nurse to death and dragged Danae to the altar of Zeus Herceios (of the Courtyard) to question her about the origin of her child. When she replied that Zeus was to blame, he refused to believe her, and packed her into a chest along with her son and hurled it into the sea.¹⁰⁷ Such is the standard account of the birth of Perseus, which can be traced back to Pherecydes; or, in a less favoured version, which may also have been quite ancient if it is correctly ascribed to Pindar, Danae gave birth to Perseus after being seduced by her uncle Proitos (a tale that was evidently devised to explain why the two brothers came to be estranged).¹⁰⁸

The chest drifted eastwards across the Aegean to Seriphos, an island in the Cyclades; in some touching verses by Simonides, Danae sings a sad lament to her infant son as they are blown through the sea in the dark in their little brass-ribbed vessel.¹⁰⁹ They fell into kind hands on their arrival, however, since DICTYS, the brother of the king of Seriphos, took them into his home after the chest became entangled in his fishing-nets or was washed ashore on the beach. Dictys and his brother (or half-brother) POLYDECTES were usually classed as sons of Magnes, son of Aiolos (see p. 380), although Pherecydes refers to them as sons of a certain Peristhenes who was descended from Nauplios. Perseus was reared by Dictys, who treated him and his mother as members of his own family, and all went well until the king caught sight of Danae and conceived a passion for her.¹¹⁰

The king of Seriphos sends Perseus to fetch the Gorgon's head

Being a man of very different character from his noble-minded brother, Polydectes was determined to gain her favours by fair means or foul, but realized that this would be difficult to achieve while her formidable son, who had now grown up, was there to protect her; so he sent Perseus away on a dangerous mission under the following circumstances. Letting it be known that he was planning to marry Hippodameia, daughter of Oinomaos, and wanted to collect contributions for the bride-price that he would have to pay to her father, Polydectes invited the leading men of the island, including Perseus, to an *eranos* (a form of feast at which those who attended were expected to make a contribution). When Perseus asked him what

sort of contribution he was expecting, he replied ‘a horse’ (a very valuable item in those days), and the young man exclaimed that he would grudge him nothing, not even the Gorgon’s head; so on the next day, when all the contributors arrived with their horses, Polydectes refused to accept a horse from Perseus, but pretended to take his purely rhetorical offer seriously and demanded that he should actually fetch the Gorgon’s head. For the king was aware that the Gorgon was so ugly that anyone who saw her would be turned to stone, and he could thus expect to be rid of Perseus once and for all.¹¹¹ It is characteristic of such tales that the hero should propose his own ordeal, as we will see with Jason (p. 398). Although it is quite often stated in modern accounts that Perseus (who might be expected to have been poor) could not afford to provide a horse, there is no indication of this in ancient sources; the idea seems to have arisen from a misreading of Apollodorus’ narrative.¹¹²

Filled with despair at his seemingly hopeless predicament, Perseus withdrew to the remotest part of the island to brood on the matter; but his distress was observed by Hermes, who urged him take courage after hearing his story, and joined together with Athena to guide him to the sisters of the Gorgons, the Graiai (Old Women), who would be able to provide him with some invaluable information. By seizing the single eye and tooth that the three sisters shared between them (see p. 53), Perseus forced them to reveal the way to some nymphs who would be able to furnish him with the tools that would enable him to fulfil his task, namely some winged sandals to carry him through the air to the lair of the Gorgons at the ends of the earth, the cap of Hades to render him invisible as he seized the Gorgon’s head, and a metallic satchel (*kibisis*, a word that appears in no other context) to hold the head after he had cut it off. After acquiring these objects from the nymphs, and also receiving an adamantine sickle (*harpē*) from Hermes, Perseus flew beyond the outer Ocean with Hermes and Athena and crept up on the Gorgons as they lay asleep. For their origin and nature, see pp. 531–2.

The two deities advised him to avert his gaze as he cut off the Gorgon’s head, and pointed to MEDUSA as the one whom he should attack, as the only one of the three sisters who was mortal. So he went up to Medusa, severed her head, placed it in the *kibisis*, and fled with all speed, successfully escaping the other two Gorgons, who tried to pursue him but were unable to find him because he was wearing the cap of invisibility. Such is Pherecydes’ version, which originated in early epic; it is reported in subsequent accounts that Athena guided his hand as he cut off the head, and that he assisted himself in the process by observing the Gorgon’s reflection in the polished surface of his bronze shield. Since Medusa was pregnant with Pegasos and Chrysaor, two children whom she had conceived to Poseidon (see p. 54), they sprang from her neck when her head was removed.¹¹³ In a wholly different account from the lost *Phorcides* of Aeschylus, the Graiai acted as guards to their sisters, but Perseus prevented them from fulfilling their task by hurling their single eye into the Tritonian lake.¹¹⁴

Perseus rescues Andromeda from a sea-monster, and exacts revenge on the king of Seriphos

While flying home with the Gorgon's head, Perseus used it to rescue his future wife from a sea-monster and, in later and less familiar stories, to bring Mt Atlas into being. To start with the latter tales, which are set at an earlier stage of the journey, Ovid tells how Perseus asked to rest for the night in the realm of a local ruler called Atlas, who was of enormous size and owned huge flocks of sheep; but on learning that he was a son of Zeus, Atlas turned him away by force because a prophecy had warned him that a wonderful tree that he owned would be robbed of its fruit by a son of Zeus. The prophecy referred of course to the apples of Hesperides, which would be robbed of their fruit by another son of Zeus, namely Heracles (see p. 255). Not wanting to confront a man who possessed such strength, Perseus responded by showing him the Gorgon's head to turn him to stone.¹¹⁵ This idea can be traced back to the early fourth century BC, when the dithyrambic poet Polyidos explained the origin of Mt Atlas in similar terms, by saying that Perseus had turned a herdsman of that name to stone.¹¹⁶ According to another such tale, first mentioned by Apollonius, the poisonous snakes of North Africa were born from drops of blood that dripped down from the Gorgon's head as Perseus was flying overhead.¹¹⁷

When he reached the kingdom of Cepheus, son of Belos or Phoinix, in Ethiopia (or Phoenicia), he noticed that a girl of wonderful beauty had been chained to a rock by the seashore. This was ANDROMEDA, a princess of the land, who had been exposed there as prey to a sea-monster as the result of an indiscretion that had been committed by her mother CASSIEPEIA. For the queen had foolishly boasted that she was lovelier than the Nereids, angering not only the sea-nymphs themselves but Poseidon too, who responded by sending a flood and a sea-monster against the land; and when the oracle of Ammon (at the oasis of Siwa in the Libyan desert) had declared that the calamity would not be brought to an end until Cassiepeia's daughter was offered up to the monster, the king had bound her to a rock by the shore at the insistence of his people. Perseus fell in love with her at first sight, however, and undertook to slay the monster if she would promise to marry him; or in a slightly different version, he approached her father Cepheus and won an equivalent promise from him. He then proceeded to kill the monster with his sword or sickle (or else turned it to stone by showing it the Gorgon's head).¹¹⁸

When he came to claim his bride, he met with some difficulty nonetheless, either because her parents were reluctant to hand her over to a stranger with uncertain prospects,¹¹⁹ or because she was already betrothed to Phineus (or Agenor), a brother of Cepheus. But he overcame the scruples of her parents; or in the latter case, he turned Phineus (or Agenor) and his friends to stone with the Gorgon's head after discovering that they were plotting against him,¹²⁰ or defeated them by force of arms when they tried to seize Andromeda from him during the wedding-feast.¹²¹ After spending a year or so at the court of his father-in-law, Perseus finally set off for Seriphos with his wife. According to Herodotus, the departing couple allowed Cepheus to adopt their first-born child, Perses (the eponym of the Persians), because the king had no son of his own to succeed him.¹²² The story of the rescue of Andromeda first appears in tragedy, but her union with Perseus was mentioned in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* and also known to Pherecydes.¹²³

On arriving back in Seriphos, Perseus found that his mother and his benefactor

Dictys had sought refuge at the altars to escape the violence of Polydectes. Pindar alludes to a version of the story, indeed, in which the king had even forced Danae into marriage during her son's absence.¹²⁴ Perseus entered the palace and invited Polydectes to assemble his friends (or the islanders in general); and when they had gathered together, he showed them the Gorgon's head, causing all of them to be turned to stone in the attitude that they happened to have assumed at the time.¹²⁵ The island was notorious ever afterwards for its many rocks. Or, in another account, Perseus displayed the head to Polydectes when the king accused him of having lied about killing Medusa.¹²⁶ Now that his mother was safe, Perseus installed Dictys on the throne in place of the dead tyrant, and returned the satchel, winged sandals, and cap of Hades to Hermes (or Athena) to be taken back to the nymphs. As for the Gorgon's head, he gave it to his divine helper Athena, who fixed it to the centre of her aegis (see p. 156).¹²⁷

Perseus accidentally kills his grandfather Acrisios, and founds Mycenae

After his adventures in Seriphos and the wider world beyond, Perseus wanted nothing more than to settle down in his ancestral homeland. So he sailed for Argos with his wife and mother, hoping to be reunited with his grandfather on his arrival. Acrisios heard that he was coming, however, and fled to Larisa in Thessaly, fearing that Perseus might kill him, as the oracle had predicted, if they should ever meet. When Perseus learned of this, he entrusted his wife and mother to his grandmother Eurydice and set off for Thessaly to convince his grandfather that he intended him no harm. While the two of them were still in Larisa, however, Teutamides, the king of the city, held some funeral games in honour of his father, and Perseus took the opportunity to demonstrate his skill with the discus (which was supposed to have been invented by him); and, while making one of his throws, he accidentally struck his grandfather on the foot, inflicting a fatal wound on him.¹²⁸ Or, in another version, he encountered his grandfather at Larisa by chance when he came to compete in the games.¹²⁹ The oracle was fulfilled as a result of this sporting accident in any case, and Acrisios was buried just outside Larisa, where his heroic shrine could be seen in historical times.¹³⁰

Hyginus records a wholly exceptional version of these events in which Acrisios was killed on Seriphos before Perseus returned to Argos. Polydectes is presented in this account as a benefactor of Perseus rather than his enemy, and the quest for the Gorgon's head is eliminated. On discovering Danae and her infant in the chest, Dictys brought them immediately to his brother, who took Danae as his wife and arranged for Perseus to be reared in the temple of Artemis. When Acrisios eventually learned that they were on the island and came in search of them, apparently many years later, Polydectes interceded on their behalf, and Perseus swore for his part that he would never cause his grandfather any harm. While Acrisios was held back by a storm, however, Polydectes died, and Perseus accidentally killed his grandfather with a discus in the usual way during the funeral games that were held for the dead king, and then sailed to Argos to claim his inheritance.¹³¹

To return to the more conventional mythology of Perseus, he felt ashamed to

inherit his grandfather's kingdom after having caused his death, even if inadvertently, and he approached Megapenthes, son of Proitos, to ask him to exchange his kingdom for the former kingdom of Acrisios. For Megapenthes was now ruling at Tiryns in succession to his father, while Acrisios had been ruling from the city of Argos. The exchange was duly effected, but instead of ruling from Tiryns, or at Midea, which he had also acquired through the exchange, Perseus decided to establish a new city and stronghold further to the north at Mycenae (properly Mykenai in Greek).¹³² According to one tale, he gave this name to the city because the cap from the end of his scabbard (*mykos* in Greek) had fallen off when he first arrived at the site, and this was the sign that had prompted him to found this new city there; or else he chose this name because he had been thirsty when he arrived there, and a refreshing spring had gushed forth when he had pulled up a mushroom (*mykos* again!).¹³³ With regard to the latter story, it may be relevant that a spring known as the Perseia could be seen at the city ruins in historical times. Perseus invited the Cyclopes (i.e. master-builders of that name, see p. 24) to construct the massive 'Cyclopean' walls that can still be seen at Mycenae, and also to fortify Midea for him.¹³⁴

The only adventure recorded for Perseus during his subsequent years in the Argolid is the very strange story of his supposed conflict with Dionysos and the women from the sea. For there was a local tradition that claimed that Dionysos attacked Argos during his reign with a force of women from the Aegean islands, who were known as the Sea-women; but Perseus defeated them in battle, killing most of the women, whose common grave could be seen at the city of Argos in historical times. Perseus and the Argives seem to have established good relations with Dionysos after the war nevertheless, and it was even said that the god arranged that his consort Ariadne should be buried there after her death.¹³⁵

The children of Perseus and Andromeda; Sthenelos becomes king of Mycenae after the death of Electryon, and sends Amphitryon and Alcmene into exile

Andromeda bore five sons to Perseus during their years in Mycenae, namely Electryon, Sthenelos, Alkaios, Mestor, and Heleios, and also a daughter who was named Gorgophone (Gorgon-slayer) in memory of her father's greatest deed.¹³⁶ Gorgophone first married Perieres, king of Messenia (see p. 448) and then Oibalos, king of Sparta; it was said that she was the first woman ever to remarry after her husband's death.¹³⁷

The sons and immediate descendants of Perseus are primarily of interest in relation to the origins and life of the greatest of his descendants, Heracles. **Electryon**, who was initially the most powerful of his sons, succeeded him as king of Mycenae, and ruled there until he was killed in a freakish accident by his nephew **Amphitryon**, the son of Electryon's elder brother Alkaios. A younger son of Perseus, **Sthenelos**, turned the situation to his own advantage by seizing power at Mycenae and banishing Amphitryon from the land on an accusation of murder. So Amphitryon went away to Thebes, never returning to Mycenae, and married his cousin **Alcmene**,

the daughter of Electryon. After sleeping with Zeus and Amphitryon on the same night, Alcmena gave birth to twin sons, bearing **Heracles** to Zeus and another son of lesser stature to her husband. Through both his mother and his putative father, who was a son of the eldest son of Perseus, Heracles had a good claim to the Mycenaean throne, but circumstances dictated that he should be born and reared in exile at Thebes, while lesser men with a perhaps inferior claim, initially Sthenelos and then his son **Eurystheus**, ruled over the former kingdom of Perseus (or at least the richest part of it). Zeus had intended, to be sure, that his son Heracles should become the great ruler in Argos, but Hera tricked him, as we will see, to ensure that Eurystheus, who was born at much the same time as Heracles, would gain that inheritance instead; and, what is more, Heracles even became obliged to serve the ignoble Eurystheus as a subordinate and perform a series of dangerous tasks for him.

This sequence of events was first set in course when ELECTRYON came under threat from some descendants of his brother **Mestor** and called on the assistance of his nephew Amphitryon. Mestor and his wife, Lysidice, daughter of Pelops, had a single child, Hippothoe, who was abducted by Poseidon to the Echinadian islands, just to the north of the entrance to the Corinthian Gulf. He slept with her there, and she bore him a son, Taphios (or Taphos), who founded the royal family that would rule the islands from that time onwards. He called his people the Teleboans because he had ‘gone far’ (*tēlou ebē*) from his ancestral Argos. Poseidon rendered his son and heir, Pterelaos, immortal by planting a golden hair in his head; and Pterelaos had six sons, who sailed to the Argolid when Electryon was ruling at Mycenae and laid claim to his throne, saying that they had a right to it because they were direct descendants of Mestor, who was a son of Perseus just as he was.¹³⁸

When Electryon refused to acknowledge that they had any proper claim, they retaliated by driving away his cattle, and when the sons of Electryon then tried to intervene, a fierce fight developed in which all the sons of Electryon were killed apart from one alone, Lycimnios, who was too young to take part, and all the sons of Pterelaos were killed likewise, apart from one who was guarding their ships. Their surviving followers escaped with the stolen cattle, however, and entrusted them to Polyxenos, the king of Elis in the western Peloponnese.¹³⁹

On learning of the fate of his sons, Electryon prepared to make war against the Teleboans to avenge their death and invited his nephew AMPHITRYON to administer his kingdom during his absence, placing his daughter Alcmena under his care, after first making him swear that he would not touch her until his return. As things turned out, however, Electryon was never able to leave his native shore. For Amphitryon soon recovered the stolen cattle by ransoming them from Polyxenos and brought them to Mycenae, but as Electryon was receiving them back, one of them broke free and charged forward, and when Amphitryon threw his club at it to try to deter it, the club rebounded from its horns and struck Electryon on the head, causing his death. Or, in a conflicting version from the Hesiodic *Shield*, Amphitryon killed his uncle in anger while quarrelling with him over cattle (presumably because Electryon refused to grant him a share of them as reward for recovering them). Irrespective of the exact circumstances in which the death occurred, Sthenelos seized it as a pretext to banish Amphitryon (who had a good claim to the throne as a son of Perseus’ eldest

son), and took control of Mycenae, Tiryns, and Midea, the main centres of power in Perseus' former realm.¹⁴⁰ He ruled at Mycenae without further incident from that time onwards, and eventually bequeathed the throne to his son Eurystheus.

The story of the conflict between Electryon and the Teleboans, in which great-great-grandsons of Perseus become involved in a dispute over the throne with a son of Perseus, obviously makes no sense at all in terms of any rational chronology. In all likelihood, the Teleboan line was originally independent of the Perseids, and this chronological inconsistency was introduced when it came to be classed as a branch of Perseus' family. In another account, which reduces the Teleboan line by one generation at least, Pterelaos was the son who was borne by Hippothoe after her abduction, and he in turn was the father of two sons, Taphios and Teleboas, who laid claim to Electryon's kingdom.¹⁴¹ Taphios was the eponym of the island of Taphos and of its people the Taphians, who are identified here with the Teleboans, a purely mythical people. The *Odyssey* refers to the Taphians as islanders who were inclined to piracy and mentions the island (or islands) of Taphos in connection with them;¹⁴² their islands, of uncertain location, came to be identified with the Echinadian islands, which lay not far from the mouth of the river Acheloos.

Even if there was some initial division of power between the sons of Perseus, Sthenelos and his son EURYSTHEUS seem to have been pictured as controlling all or most of the territories and cities that had formerly been ruled by Perseus, including Tiryns and Midea. Eurystheus was of importance in myth only in relation to his great half-cousin Heracles, whose life-history will be traced in the next chapter. His reign was as uneventful as that of his father until Heracles arrived in the Argolid, at the order of the Delphic oracle, to perform a series of dangerous tasks at his command (see pp. 241ff.). Although Heracles was born at Thebes and spent most of his life in exile, he thus came to be based in his ancestral land during that period. It was commonly agreed that Eurystheus was as mean-minded and cowardly (see e.g. p. 245) as Heracles was noble and brave. After the death of Heracles, Eurystheus tried to free himself from the danger of any threat from the hero's descendants by attacking the sons of Heracles while they were at their most vulnerable (see pp. 277–8); but he was defeated and killed, and they invaded the Peloponnese soon afterwards to try to seize control of his kingdom and other territories too. It was the will of the gods, however, that the descendants of Heracles (the Heraclids) should not establish themselves in the Peloponnese until well after the Trojan War, and they were thus obliged to withdraw after an initial invasion, or were checked at the Isthmus of Corinth (see pp. 278–9). After the death of Eurystheus and the failure on the initial Heraclid invasion of the Peloponnese, the Mycenaeans were advised by an oracle that they should choose a member of a wholly different family, the Pelopids, as their new ruler. So the kingdom passed to Atreus, son of Pelops, and remained under Pelopid rule until his great-grandson Teisamenos was ousted by the Heraclids when they finally made their successful invasion (see pp. 279–80). The interlude of Pelopid rule at Mycenae will be considered in relation to the Trojan War (see pp. 419ff and 513ff).

Notes

- 1 Apollod. 2.1.1; Hyg. *Fab.* 143 (Argia).
- 2 *Phoronis* fr.1 Davies, cf. Acus. 2F23.
- 3 Paus. 2.15.5.
- 4 Hyg. *Fab.* 143.
- 5 Paus. 2.15.5.
- 6 Paus. 2.19.5, schol. *Soph. El.* 4.
- 7 Apollod. 2.1.1, Paus. 2.22.1, schol. Eur. *Orest.* 932 respectively for name of wife; Apollod. l.c. on Niobe and Apis.
- 8 Paus. 2.22.6 (grove).
- 9 Hes. fr. 124, Acus. 2F26 (both from Apollod. 2.1.3).
- 10 E.g. Apollod. 2.1.2–3, Paus. 2.16.1.
- 11 Apollod. 2.1.3 (ascribed to ‘many of the tragedians’), Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 590, Hdt. 1.1, Ov. *Met.* 1.584, etc.
- 12 Apollod. 2.1.1–3.
- 13 Pher. 3F66.
- 14 Aesch. *Suppl.* 291–305.
- 15 Apollod. 2.1.3.
- 16 As stated in Hes. fr. 126, Apollod. 2.1.3.
- 17 Aesch. *Prom. Bound.* 640–86; Zeus touches her in Egypt and Epaphos is thus born there, *ibid.* 847–51.
- 18 Ov. *Met.* 1.568ff; writes with hoof in dust, 649–50.
- 19 Pher. 3F66, Hes. fr. 294 from *Aigimios*. Argos earthborn, Acus. 2F27 (from Apollod. l.c.), Aesch. *Suppl.* 305, *Prom. Bound* 567; son of Arestor, also Hes. fr. 246, schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1116; son of Agenor, Apollod. l.c.; son of Peiranthos, Hyg. *Fab.* 145.
- 20 *Soph. Inachos* fr. 281 Radt, schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1116.
- 21 Apollod. 2.1.2.
- 22 A.R. 1.111–2, 324–5.
- 23 Moschus 2.55–60, Ov. *Met.* 1.720–3, Vat. *Myth.* 1.18 respectively.
- 24 Apollod. 2.1.1–3.
- 25 Acus. 2F24 (see Paus. 2.16.3).
- 26 Paus. 2.17.5, Euseb. 3.8.1.
- 27 Hes. fr. 296 (Euboea named after cow), Str. 10.1.3 (named after her because she gave birth to Epaphos in cave there), Et. Magn. s.v. Euboeia and Steph. Byz. s.v. Argoura (both quoted under Hes. fr. 296).
- 28 Apollod. 2.1.3, cf. Aesch. *Suppl.* 540–73; Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 786–815, Apollod. l.c. also refers to Io’s passage through the ‘Cimmerian land’.
- 29 Apollod. l.c., Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 840–1.
- 30 Apollod. 2.1.3; on the touch of Zeus, Aesch. *Suppl.* 311–4, 584–9, *Prom. Bound* 847–51, Moschus 2.50–2.
- 31 Identified with Isis, Call. *Epigr.* 57 (first mention), Apollod. 2.1.3, Ov. *Met.* 1.747, Hyg. *Fab.* 145 (Zeus made her a goddess of the Egyptians called Isis), Lucian *D.D.* 3, etc. The Greeks also identified Isis with Demeter as Apollodorus remarks, cf. Hdt. 2.59, 156. Epaphos identified with Apis, Hdt. 2.153, 3.27.
- 32 Apollod. 2.1.3.
- 33 Pi. *Nem.* 10.5, Hyg. *Fab.* 149, 275, cf. Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 810–5 (the ‘distant colony’ here is evidently Memphis).
- 34 Memphis, Apollod. 2.1.4, schol. Lyc. 894; Cassiepeia, Hyg. *Fab.* 149.
- 35 Apollod. 2.1.4, cf. Aesch. *Suppl.* 314–6, Pi. *Pyth.* 4.14–5.
- 36 Apollod. 2.1.4, cf. Hes. fr. 137–8 (Belos and Agenor mentioned, but no surviving record of parentage), Aesch. *Suppl.* 317 (Belos as son of Libye), Moschus 2.38–40 (Libye seduced by Poseidon).
- 37 See e.g. Apollod. 3.1.1. with 3.4.1.
- 38 Apollod. 2.1.4, cf. Aesch. *Suppl.* 315–23.
- 39 They were described as such by Euripides, for instance, according to Apollod. l.c.
- 40 Hes. fr. 137 (cited by Str., 1.2.34, who ascribes the same to Stesichorus).
- 41 Apollod. 2.1.4, *Danaïdes* fr. 1 Davies. Aigyptos could fear for his own part that Danaos would become too powerful through marriage-alliances if he married his daughters elsewhere, cf. Serv. *Aen.* 10.497.
- 42 Apollod. 2.1.4 (ship described as first of kind), cf. Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 853–6, Hyg. *Fab.* 168.
- 43 Schol. *Il.* 1.42, schol. Eur. *Orest.* 872, schol. Stat. *Theb.* 2.222.
- 44 Apollod. 2.1.4, Hdt. 2.182, Call. fr. 100, D.S. 5.58.1, Str. 14.2.8, 11.
- 45 Paus. 2.19.3 (wolf story), 2.16.1 (descent of Gelanor), Apollod. 2.1.4 (merely that Gelanor surrendered the

- kingdom to Danaos).
- 46 Apollod. 2.1.5, cf. Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 859–69, Hyg. *Fab.* 168.
- 47 Apollod. 2.1.5.
- 48 Pi. *Pyth.* 9.111–6.
- 49 Paus. 3.12.2.
- 50 Ps.Pl. *Axiochos* 371e (probably first century BC) is our first literary source for the Danaids as water-carriers, but they already appear as such in southern Italian vase-paintings of the fourth century BC; also in Ovid *Ibis* 177–8, 355–6, Horace *Ode* 3.11.22–32, Lucian *D.M.* 8, etc.
- 51 Paus. 2.24.3.
- 52 Apollod. 2.1.5.
- 53 Zenob. 4.86.
- 54 Schol. Eur. *Orest.* 872 citing Phrynichos (= fr.1 Snell), Paus. 7.21.6.
- 55 Apollod. 2.1.4, Hyg. *Fab.* 169.
- 56 Hyg. *Fab.* 169A. On this episode, see also Aesch. fr. 128–33 Mette, Propertius 2.26.45–50, Lucian *D.M.* 8.
- 57 Paus. 2.37.5.
- 58 Hes. fr. 128, Call. fr. 65, 66, Str. 8.6.8, schol. Eur. *Phoen* 188.
- 59 Pher. 3F4, Apollod. 2.1.4; as founder of Nauplion, Paus. 2.38.2.
- 60 A.R. 1.133–8.
- 61 Apollod. 2.1.5, citing *Returns* (= fr. 1 Davies) and the tragic poets.
- 62 Apollod. 2.1.5, etc.
- 63 Ibid., schol. Eur. *Hec.* 886 respectively; or because of her desire for children according to Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 865–7. See also Pi. *Nem.* 1.6 (Hypermnestira alone kept sword in scabbard) and Horace's fine lines in *Ode* 3.11.33–52 (which suggest that she will be parted from Lynceus forever, cf. Ov. *Heroides* 14).
- 64 Paus. 2.25.4.
- 65 Apollod. 2.1.5 (imprisoned by Danaos), Paus. 2.19.6 (trial, statue), 2.20.5 (site of trial), 2.21.1 (sanctuary).
- 66 Apollod. 2.1.5.
- 67 Schol. Eur. *Hec.* 886, Serv. *Aen.* 10.497, cf. Archil. 305.
- 68 Apollod. 2.2.1, Paus. 2.16.1.
- 69 Hyg. *Fab.* 170.
- 70 *Pap. Oxy.* 10.1241 Col. IV l. 13–4, Serv. *Aen.* 3.286, Apollod. 2.2.1 respectively.
- 71 Paus. 2.20.4, 2.21.2.
- 72 Apollod. 2.2.1, cf. Hes. fr. 129, Bacch. 11.65–9.
- 73 Schol. *Il.* 2.536, schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 8.73, Steph. Byz. s.v. Abantis.
- 74 Apollod. 2.2.1; cf. the similar tradition about Crisos and Panopeus, p. 565, and the Hebrew story of Jacob and Esau, *Genesis* 25.22–3.
- 75 Paus. 2.25.6, Hesych. s.v. Daulis.
- 76 Apollod. 2.2.1.
- 77 Hom. *Il.* 6.160ff.
- 78 Bacch. 11.64–72. On this conflict, see also schol. Eur. *Orest.* 965.
- 79 Apollod. 2.2.2, cf. Hes. fr. 129.24 for names of daughters; there are two Proitides only, Lysippe and Iphianassa, in Pher. 3F114, and their names vary to differing extents in other sources.
- 80 E.g. Apollod. 2.3.1 and schol. *Il.* 6.155 respectively.
- 81 Hom. *Il.* 6.155–95, cf. Apollod. 2.3.1–2, Hyg. *Fab.* 57. Bellerophon's wife unnamed in *Il.*, Philonoe in Apollod., Anticleia in schol. Pi. *Ol.* 13.120, Cassandra in schol. *Il.* 6.155. On Chimaira, see also Hes. *Theog.* 319–25, on B's Lycian ordeals, Pi. *Ol.* 13.83–90.
- 82 Hom. *Il.* 6.195–206.
- 83 Pi. *Ol.* 13.63–90.
- 84 Paus. 2.4.1.
- 85 Str. 8.6.21 and schol. *Il.* 6.155 respectively.
- 86 Hypoth. Eur. *Stheneboia* (Nauck pp. 567–8).
- 87 Pi. *Isth.* 7.43–8, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.18 (overcome by fear when looked down).
- 88 Schol. *Il.* 6.155, schol. Lyc. 17, schol. *Od.* 13.130c.
- 89 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.18.
- 90 Apollod. 1.9.11.
- 91 Schol. A.R. 1.118.
- 92 Apollod. 1.9.11.
- 93 Schol. *Il.* 2.744
- 94 Apollod. 1.9.12, Pher. 3F33; cf. Hom. *Od.* 11.281–97, 15.222–38, Hes. fr. 37.1–8 (reference to story), fr.

- 272 (healing of Iphiclos).
- 95 Pher. 3F114.
- 96 Acus. 2F28 (from Apollod. 2.2.2).
- 97 Hes. fr. 129–33.
- 98 Hdt. 9.34.
- 99 D.S. 4.68.4–5.
- 100 Paus. 2.18.4.
- 101 Bacch. 11. 40–57, 82–109.
- 102 Apollod. 2.2.2.
- 103 Apollod. 2.2.2, cf. Pher. 3F114 (Lysippe and Iphianassa only, latter married Melampous), Ael. *V.H.* 3.42 (Elege and Kelaine), Serv. *Ecl.* 6.45 (Lysippe, Iphinoe, Cyrianassa); D.S. 4.68.5 (Melampous married Iphianeira, daughter of Megapenthes).
- 104 Apollod. 2.4.1, Pher. 3F10. Pherecydes seems to have been Apollodorus' main source for his account of the life of Perseus.
- 105 Horace *Odes* 3.16.1–4, Ov. *Met.* 4.697–8.
- 106 First Pi. *Pyth.* 12.17–8, Pher. 3F10, Soph. *Antig.* 944–50; possibly in Hes. fr. 135, but the papyrus is too poorly preserved for it to be possible to tell whether the 'golden' in line 5 has anything to do with a shower of gold.
- 107 Apollod. 2.4.1, Pher. 3F10, schol. *Il.* 14.319; the main features of the story already in Hes. fr. 135.
- 108 Pi. fr. 284 SM (in schol. *Il.* cit.); cited as variant in Apollod. 2.4.1.
- 109 Simon. 543.
- 110 Apollod. 2.4.1, Pher. 3F10; descent of Dictys and brother, Apollod. 1.9.6, Hes. fr. 8; alternative genealogy, Pher. 3F4.
- 111 Apollod. 2.4.2, Pher. 3F11; allusion to *eranos*, Pi. *Pyth.* 12.14–5.
- 112 Although Apollodorus' language is somewhat ambiguous, we should surely understand that Polydectes refuses to *take* the contribution from Perseus, rather than that he fails to *get* it; this is made absolutely clear by Pherecydes, who was probably Apollodorus' source at this point. Pherecydes also indicates that each guest was expected to contribute a single horse; Apollodorus' reference to 'horses' in connection with Perseus is probably an error.
- 113 Pher. 3F11, Apollod. 2.4.2–3, cf. Hes. *Shield* 216–37, Ov. *Met.* 4.770–86; decapitation of Medusa and birth of her two children in Hes. *Theog.* 278–83.
- 114 See Hyg. *Astr.* 2.12 and Eratosth. 22 along with other material cited under Aesch. fr. 262 Radt.
- 115 Ov. *Met.* 4.631–62.
- 116 Polyidos 837 *PMG*.
- 117 A.R. 4.1504–17, Ov. *Met.* 4.617–20.
- 118 Apollod. 2.4.3 (gains marriage-promise from Cepheus), Eur. *Andromeda*, fr. 132 Nauck (from Andromeda herself); full narrative Ov. *Met.* 4.665–764; Eratosth. 15 and 17, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.9 and 11 (exposure of Andromeda in Euripides' play), Eratosth. 16 and 36, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.10 (Cassiopeia had claimed to rival the Nereids in beauty in Sophocles' *Andromeda*), Hyg. *Fab.* 64 (Cassiopeia claimed that Andromeda's beauty surpassed that of Nereids), schol. Lyc. 836 (Perseus turned monster to stone).
- 119 As can be inferred from the fragments of Euripides' *Andromeda*.
- 120 Apollod. 2.4.3, Hyg. *Fab.* 64 (Agenor).
- 121 Ov. *Met.* 5.1–47.
- 122 Apollod. 2.4.3 with 2.4.5 (Perses); on Perses, see also Hdt. 7.61, Hellanic. 4F59.
- 123 Hes. fr. 135, Pher. 3F12.
- 124 Pi. *Pyth.* 12.14–5.
- 125 Apollod. 2.4.3, Pher. 3F11; cf. Pi. *Pyth.* 10.46–8 and 12.12 (turned islanders to stone, without further details).
- 126 Ov. *Met.* 5.242–9, Serv. *Aen.* 6.289.
- 127 Apollod. 2.4.3, Pher. 3F11.
- 128 Pher. 3F12, Paus. 2.16.2.
- 129 Apollod. 2.4.4 (it is possible, however, that this is simply a careless summary of Pherecydes' version).
- 130 Apollod. 2.4.4, schol. A.R. 4.1091 (*hērōon*); or Clem. Alex. *Protrep.* 3.45, buried in temple of Athena on acropolis of city.
- 131 Hyg. *Fab.* 63.
- 132 Apollod. 2.4.4, Paus. 2.16.3.
- 133 Both etymologies in Paus. 2.16.3; the first also in Hecat. 1F22, Steph. Byz. s.v. Mykenai.
- 134 Paus. 2.16.5.
- 135 Paus. 2.20.3, 2.22.1.

- 136 Apollod. 2.4.5; cf. Hes. fr. 135 (poorly preserved, but probably Sthenelos, Alcaios and Electryon as three sons), Herodorus 31F15 (Mestor added).
- 137 Paus. 2.21.8 (first to remarry).
- 138 Apollod. 2.4.5 (genealogies), 2.4.6 (sons of Pterelaos arrive to claim land).
- 139 Apollod. 2.4.6, Tzet. Lyc. 932 (probably following Apollod.); cf. Pher. 3F13b, A.R. 1.747–51 (allusion to fight as portrayed on cloak of Jason) with schol. 747.
- 140 Apollod. 2.4.6; Electryon killed in anger, Hes. *Shield* 11–2, 80–3, cf. schol. *Il.* 4.323 (killed as a result of disagreement over cattle).
- 141 Herodorus 31F15.
- 142 Hom. *Od.* 1.417–9 (Taphos), Taphians as pirates, *ibid.* 15.427, 16.426 etc.

11

The life of Heracles

The birth of Heracles and his early life at Thebes

Amphitryon arrives in Thebes with Alcmene and mounts a campaign against the Teleboans

Although Heracles was a member of the old Argive royal family, as a descendant of Perseus, he was born abroad in Thebes after his putative father AMPHITRYON was forced to depart into exile with his mother ALCMENE. As was described at the end of the last chapter, Amphitryon was banished by his uncle Sthenelos for having killed another of his uncles, Electryon, king of Mycenae (by accident according to the usual tradition). Sthenelos became the new king of Mycenae, to be succeeded by his son Eurystheus, while the great Heracles was fated to be born in another land and live a wandering life without ever having a kingdom of his own. Amphitryon was accompanied to Thebes by Electryon's daughter Alcmene, who was already betrothed to Amphitryon, and also by her only surviving brother, Licymnios. Her other brothers had all been killed by members of another branch of the family who had sailed to Argos in the hope of seizing the Mycenaean throne.

Amphitryon received a friendly welcome from Creon, king of Thebes, who purified him of the manslaughter that he had committed. Although he now pressed Alcmene to marry him (or to consummate their marriage if they were already married), she declared that she would not accept him into her bed until he had avenged the death of her brothers.¹ They had been killed, as has already been described (see p. 230), by some sons of PTERELAOS, a descendant of Perseus who ruled over the Teleboans, a people who lived in a group of islands just outside the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth. So Amphitryon immediately set to work to mount an expedition against the Teleboans; and it was while he was away on this forthcoming campaign that Zeus approached Alcmene to father Heracles.

When Amphitryon asked Creon to assist him in this enterprise, the king promised to do so if he would first rescue the Thebans from the depredations of the TEUMESSIAN FOX. For, according to a tale that can be traced back to early epic, a huge ferocious vixen had established its lair on Mt Teumessos, about five miles north-east of Thebes; it had been sent by the gods to punish the Thebans for some unexplained reason (or sent by Dionsyos specifically, doubtless because he had been

rejected by Pentheus, see p. 162), and was ravaging the land. This beast presented an extremely difficult problem because it was fated never to be caught, but Amphitryon knew that an Athenian hero, Cephalos, son of Deion, owned a dog that was fated always to catch its prey (see p. 326 for the story of Cephalos and the origin of his dog), so he visited Cephalos in Attica and asked him to bring his dog to hunt down the fox, promising him a share of the spoils from the forthcoming war if he would do so. So Cephalos arrived with his dog, and a paradoxical situation then arose when a beast that was fated to always catch its prey was set in pursuit of another that was fated never to be caught. Zeus was obliged to intervene, and he resolved the problem in a very neat fashion by turning both animals to stone, so that the dog never fails in the hunt and the fox is never caught.² Or, in a later version from the astronomical literature, which rather spoils the story, he turned the fox alone to stone and transferred the dog to the heavens to become the constellation of the Great Dog (Canis Major).³ The legend of the Teumessian Fox seems to have been brought into connection with that of Amphitryon at a secondary stage, since, in the earliest tradition, Cephalos apparently came to Thebes for reasons of his own, to seek purification after having accidentally killed his wife (see p. 326).

After winning Creon's support by this means, Amphitryon collected together some further allies, including Cephalos, Panopeus (a hero from Phocis) and Heleios, the youngest son of Perseus, and sailed away to attack the Teleboans.⁴ Although he was able to sack most of their islands with no great difficulty, he was initially unable to capture Taphos, the island of their king Pterelaos, because Poseidon (who was his grandfather, see pp. 229–30) had implanted a golden hair in his head, which rendered him immune to death as long as it remained in place. Amphitryon finally received help from an unexpected quarter when the king's daughter, COMAITHO, fell in love with him (or with Cephalos in another account) after seeing him at a distance, and tried to win his favour by pulling the magical hair from her father's head. When Pterelaos died as a consequence, Amphitryon was able to complete his conquest; but instead of repaying Comaitho as she would have wished, he killed her in horror at her unfilial act of treachery.⁵ A very similar tale was told in connection with Minos' campaign against Megara, see p. 291.

The conception and birth of Heracles

As soon as the spoils had been collected together, Amphitryon set sail for Boeotia, eager to prove his success to his beloved and win his way into her bed. Shortly before he arrived back at Thebes, however, Zeus forestalled him by assuming his guise to seduce Alcmena. On being assured that vengeance had been exacted against the Teleboans as she had demanded, and on being offered a magnificent cup moreover from the spoils by way of proof, Alcmena welcomed the disguised god into her arms; and he extended the time of their love-making by lengthening the night to three times its normal length. Later in the same night or on the next night, her true husband arrived home to report his triumph and so claim his promised reward. Surprised and disappointed to find that her welcome was none too passionate, he questioned her about the matter; and when she protested that she had received him

warmly enough a very short time before, he consulted the seer Teiresias, who informed him of Zeus's deception. He had intercourse with her nonetheless on that night, and she conceived twin sons of contrasting nature, HERACLES, a mighty hero and future god as her child by Zeus, and IPHICLES (or Iphiclos), a hero of no very exceptional stature as her child by Amphitryon.⁶

It was not only on account of her beauty that Zeus set out to seduce Alcmena, but also because he wanted to father a very great hero by her who would bring benefit to the human race, as well as to the gods themselves by helping them in their war against the Giants. He originally intended, furthermore, that this son of his should be a mighty ruler in Argos, but this part of his plan was foiled by Hera. As the story is recounted in the *Iliad*, Zeus boasted of his intentions to the other gods, telling them that Eileithuia, the goddess of childbirth, would bring a male child to birth on that day who would become king over all who lived around him (i.e. in Argos), and would be born from the race of those who came from Zeus's blood (i.e. from the Perseids, who were descended from Perseus, a son of Zeus). By making this ill-advised declaration, he alerted Hera, who resented all her husband's illegitimate children and immediately plotted to rob this one of his intended inheritance. She happened to know that Alcmena was not the only woman who was expecting a child of Perseid descent because Nicippe (or Amphibia), the wife of the present king of Mycenae (Sthenelos, son of Perseus), was also heavily pregnant. So she persuaded Zeus to swear on oath that the son of his stock who would be born on that day would enjoy the destiny that he had announced; and she then instructed the Eileithuias (goddesses of childbirth) to delay Alcmena's delivery, while she herself hurried down from Olympos to ensure that the wife of Sthenelos should bring her child to birth at once in the seventh month of her pregnancy. As a consequence, Eurystheus, the son of Sthenelos, was born on that day instead of Heracles, and Zeus was therefore obliged by his oath to grant him the inheritance that he had been planning to grant to Heracles. This meant that Eurystheus became the great king of Mycenae (in succession to his father, see pp. 229–30), while Heracles never had a kingdom of his own.⁷ Heracles was thus destined to spend most of his life outside his ancestral homeland, and to be subordinate to Eurystheus even while he was there.

According to a tale first recorded in the Hellenistic era, the birth of Heracles was finally expedited through the ingenuity of a servant or friend of Alcmena. In the familiar version by Ovid, the goddess of childbirth, here appearing under her Latin name of Lucina, delayed the hero's birth by seven days and nights by sitting outside Alcmena's bedroom door with her legs crossed and her fingers intertwined (gestures of enclosure that would achieve their effect by a form of sympathetic magic). Alcmena had a clever servant-maid, however, who noticed how the goddess was sitting and realized why she had adopted that attitude. So this maid, GALANTHIS by name, called out to her, saying, 'You must congratulate my mistress because her prayers have been answered and she has given birth to her child!', and so provoked the goddess to leap up in astonishment and unclench her hands. The charm was undone as a consequence, and Heracles could be born at last. Angered by the girl's deception, and by her subsequent laughter, the goddess turned her into a weasel, a beast that runs around the house much as Galanthis had done as a busy maidservant

(for weasels, or strictly speaking, ferrets, were kept in the house to keep down pests much like cats in modern times).⁸

Or, in a Greek version ascribed to the Hellenistic poet Nicander, Galinthias, as she is called here, was of high birth as a daughter of Proitos (a prominent Theban who gave his name to the Proitidian gates of the city), and she was thus a friend and former playmate of Alcmena rather than a servant of hers. The story is much the same as in Ovid, except that the Moirai (Fates) work together with the goddess of childbirth to hinder the birth, as a favour to Hera, and it is they who turn Galinthias into a weasel after she foils their scheme. This Greek account refers to an important matter, however, which is passed over by Ovid, the cultic implications of the myth. For we are told that Hecate made the weasel her attendant out of pity for Galinthias, and that Heracles later commemorated her services to him by erecting an altar to her outside his house at Thebes and offering sacrifices on it, hence the sacrifices that the Thebans used to offer to Galinthias before their festival of Heracles. It would seem that Galinthias was a heroine who had been honoured at Thebes from an early period, and that someone was inspired to devise this transformation myth to explain the origin of her cult because her name was reminiscent of that of a weasel (*galeē* in Greek).⁹ Pausanias records yet another version of the story in which the Pharmacides (Witches), the beings who were sent by Hera to delay the birth, were tricked in the same way by Historis, a daughter of the seer Teiresias; however, there is no mention in this case of any transformation.¹⁰

The childhood and education of Heracles, and his murder of Linos

When Heracles was eight or ten months old, or even newly born, Hera sent two huge snakes to attack him and his half-brother in their cradle; but the infant hero seized them by their necks, one in each hand, and choked them to death. In the two fullest accounts of the episode by Pindar and Theocritus, the seer Teiresias was summoned to comment on the marvel, and took this as an opportunity to foretell the extraordinary destiny that lay in wait for Heracles, predicting that he would finally be received among the gods after overcoming many such dangers.¹¹ In an alternative version, the snakes were sent not by the goddess but by Amphitryon, who introduced them into the children's cradle to enable him to discover which was his son; and when Heracles stayed to confront the snakes while Iphicles tried to flee, he recognized at once that Heracles was the one who had divine blood flowing in his veins.¹²

A further tale of the hero's infancy tells how Hera was deceived into suckling him. In the most familiar version of the story, Hermes took the baby Heracles up to Olympus and applied him to Hera's breast while she was asleep (or without revealing his true identity to her); and when she awoke (or learned who he was), she pushed him away with such violent haste that some milk spilled out of her breast to form the Milky Way.¹³ She conferred immortality on him by this involuntary action, or his final apotheosis could at least be regarded as being prefigured by it.



Figure 11.1. The baby Heracles strangles the serpents sent by Hera. Greek vase-painting, red-figure stamnos. Berlin painter, c. 500 BC. Found at Vulci. Paris, Musée du Louvre, France. © ak-images/ Erich Lessing.

As would be expected, the hero's education was traditionally said to have been entrusted to the most celebrated experts. He learned the art of bowmanship from Eurytos of Oichalia, who was a grandson of Apollo (see p. 258) and a skilled archer like his divine ancestor, as were all the male members of his family. In one form of this legend, indeed, Eurytos was eventually killed by Apollo because he dared to challenge the god to an archery contest (see p. 150); but he was more commonly said to have died at the hand of Heracles himself, his greatest pupil (see p. 268 for the circumstances). Heracles received instruction in the art of wrestling from Autolykos, a great trickster (see p. 554) who was presumably a past master of all the wiles of the ring. He learned the art of chariot-driving from his father and the art of war from Castor, one of the Dioscuri.¹⁴ Music was less to his taste, however, and less in accord with his natural abilities. His music teacher, LINOS, became so exasperated by his slowness that he eventually lost patience and struck him, to the great indignation of his young pupil, who struck back in anger with his lyre or plectrum, with fatal effect. Although Heracles escaped prosecution by citing a law of the great Cretan law-maker Rhadamanthys (see p. 301) that justified retaliation in self-defence, his father decided that it would be prudent to cut his education short at this point, and so he sent Heracles out into the countryside to tend the family herds.¹⁵

There are two other bodies of myth associated with short-lived figures called Linos, one founded in Argive tradition and the other in Boeotian tradition. Their legends were inspired in each case by the existence of an ancient reaping song known as the 'Linos-song', which had a refrain, *ailinon*, which could be interpreted as

meaning ‘alas for Linos!’ (although it was in fact a word of foreign origin). In the Boeotian tradition, Linos was another mythical musician, a son of the Muse Ourania, who had borne him to a certain Amphimaros, son of Poseidon. He grew up to become the finest of singers, but soon provoked his own death at the hand of Apollo by boasting that he could rival him as a singer; and as grief for his death spread through the world, the Linos-song was composed as a lament for him.¹⁶ As in the case of other mythical musicians such as Orpheus and Mousaios, the name of Linos came to be attached to apocryphal poems in historical times. The Linos of Argive tradition differed from the others in being a non-musician who died as a child. After bearing him to Apollo, Psamathe, the daughter of an early Argive king called Crotopos, had him exposed for fear of her father’s anger, but the shepherd who was assigned to perform that task reared him as a member of his own family instead, until the child happened to be torn apart by his dogs. On hearing of this, Psamathe was so distressed that she told the whole story to her father, who refused to believe that she had really borne the child to a god and ordered that she should be put to death. When Argos was then struck by a plague through the anger of Apollo, the citizens were advised by an oracle to appease the dead mother and child, and they achieved this by means of prayers and laments, hence the origin of the Linos-song.¹⁷

The lion of Cithairon, the daughters of Thespios, and a first campaign

When Heracles reached the age of eighteen, he embarked on his first adventure by setting off to confront the ferocious lion of Cithairon, which lived in the mountain range of that name on the southern borders of Boeotia. Since it was preying not only on Amphitryon’s cattle but also on those of THESPIOS, the eponymous ruler of Thespiiai in south-western Boeotia, Heracles stayed at his court for fifty nights while trying to track the beast. Now the king had fifty daughters, and he was so impressed by the young hero’s strength that he wanted to ensure that each of his daughters should conceive a child to him. He achieved this, in one account, by introducing a different daughter into his bed each night, so that Heracles slept with each in turn in the fond belief that he was sleeping with the same girl on each occasion.¹⁸ Or, in versions that savour more of folklore, Heracles enjoyed the favours of all fifty in seven nights, or of forty-nine of them in a single night.¹⁹ In the latter account, one of them refused to have anything to do with him, and he paid her back by forcing her to serve as his virgin priestess (a story that explained why the temple of Heracles at Thespiiai was served by a virgin priestess who remained in that post until her death). This episode of the daughters of Thespios, which has its comical side as so often with Heracles, has no inherent connection with that of the lion hunt. Diodorus tells it as a separate story, indeed, stating that Thespios invited the young Heracles to a sacrifice and feast for the specific purpose of ensuring that all his daughters would bear children to him.²⁰ Each of his daughters bore a son to Heracles in any case, apart from the eldest (and the youngest too in one account) who gave birth to twins instead. The children were known as the THESPIADES after their grandfather. Heracles sent most of them to Sardinia when they grew up to found a colony under the leadership of his nephew Iolaos, except for a few who remained behind, seven at

Thespias and one or two at Thebes, to become founders of noble families in the province of their birth.²¹ As for the myth of the lion hunt, it was cast wholly into the shade by the more diverting story of the daughters of Thespias, and nothing is recorded of it beyond the fact that Heracles eventually killed the beast.²²

While travelling back from the lion hunt, Heracles happened to run across some heralds who had been sent by a local ruler, ERGINOS, to collect an annual tribute that the Thebans were obliged to pay to him. Erginos was the king of the powerful city of Orchomenos in north-eastern Boeotia, and his people were known as the Minyans (see p. 557). The tribute had come to be imposed on the Thebans in the following circumstances. Some years before, Clymenos, the father of Erginos, had visited Onchestos, a town that lay between Orchomenos and Thebes, to attend a festival of Poseidon, and he had been fatally wounded by a stone thrown by the charioteer of Creon's father Menoikeus, or else murdered by some Thebans as a result of some trivial quarrel. After hearing of his father's death (or after receiving a direct order from his dying father), Erginos had waged a successful campaign against the Thebans, and had forced them to agree to send him an annual tribute of a hundred cattle for twenty years. Heracles was so angered by this imposition and by the arrogant behaviour of the heralds that he cut off their noses, ears, and hands, and hung them around their necks on cords, telling them to take those to their king by way of tribute. Erginos responded by launching a second expedition against Thebes; but Heracles was available to command the Thebans on this occasion, and he soon killed Erginos and put his followers to flight. He then forced the Orchomenians to pay tribute to the Thebans, demanding that they should send twice as much as they had been receiving.²³

Although Euripides refers to Heracles' defence of the Minyans, and there is also a quite early mention of the tribute paid to the Orchomenians, we have to rely on mythographers of a later period for a full narrative. In Diodorus' version, which was probably of Hellenistic origin, the Minyans had deprived the Thebans of their weapons after imposing the tribute, as a precaution against any future revolt, and Creon was thus ready to yield to their superior power when Erginos demanded the surrender of the men who had mutilated his heralds. Heracles obtained arms for the Thebans, however, by stripping their temples of all the weapons that had been dedicated in them, and persuaded the young men of the city to fight for their freedom. When Erginos advanced against the city, Heracles attacked him and his troops on narrow ground, to deprive them of the advantage of their superior numbers, and killed Erginos along with much of his army. He was then able to attack Orchomenos unexpectedly and burn it to the ground.²⁴ Some said that he destroyed its power forever (see further on p. 558)

Heracles founds a family in Thebes with Megara, but kills their children in a fit of madness

Creon rewarded Heracles for his services in the war by granting him his daughter MEGARA as a wife. She is already mentioned in the *Odyssey* as one of the famous women who were seen by Odysseus in the Underworld in earlier times, but Homer

reports nothing more about her than that she was the wife of Heracles and a daughter of Creon.²⁵ The lyric poet Stesichorus, writing in the first half of the sixth century BC, is the first author who is known to have recounted the grim story associated with the marriage, telling how it ended in tragedy when Heracles went mad and killed all the children who had been born from it²⁶ (numbering from two to eight in different accounts). While in the grip of this madness, which was inflicted on him by Hera, he murdered his children either by throwing them into a fire or by shooting them down with his arrows; and in some accounts, he also killed some of the children of his half-brother Iphicles. Apollodorus follows Pherecydes in stating that he threw his children into a fire, and adds that he inflicted the same fate on two children of Iphicles.²⁷ Or, in Diodorus' version, he first tried to kill his nephew Iolaos and went on to shoot his own children when Iolaos managed to escape.²⁸ Or, in another account by Nicolaus of Damascus (a writer associated with the court of Herod the Great), Heracles killed two of the children of Iphicles and then his own children, tearing the last from Megara's breast; and he would have killed Megara too if she had not been rescued by Iphicles, who also saved his own eldest son Iolaos.²⁹ This marked the end of the Theban period of Heracles' life, since he had to go away to be purified and could no longer live in the city thereafter as the husband of Megara.

According to a local tradition at Thebes, Heracles came close to killing his aged putative father Amphitryon too, but was prevented from committing this further crime, even graver in Greek eyes than those that he had already committed, by the prompt action of Athena, who stunned the hero with a well-aimed stone. The missile in question, which was known as the *sōphronistēr* (i.e. stone of wisdom or restraint), could be seen in the city in historical times.³⁰ Amphitryon is presented by Euripides too as having come under threat, in his surviving play on the episode (see below), although Apollodorus places his death somewhat earlier, saying that he was killed in battle while fighting valiantly against the Orchomenians.³¹ It was generally agreed in any case that he died before Heracles embarked on his labours. Only a single exploit is recorded for him from his latter years at Thebes, his defeat of the Euboean chieftain Chalcodon, who was killed by him near the city when he tried to exact a tribute from the Thebans.³² After his death, his wife Alcmene was sometimes said to have married Rhadamanthys, a wise member of the Cretan royal family, and was also introduced into the legend of the Heraclids (see pp. 277–8). As for her brother Licymnios, who had accompanied her from Thebes, the only significant tale recorded of him is that of his death (see p. 282).

This tale of murder and mayhem was almost certainly a very ancient one that was recounted in early epic, and it seems telling in this regard that 'the madness of Heracles' should be included among the famous tales that are reported to have been recounted by Nestor in the *Cypria*, an early epic in the Trojan cycle, along with the stories of Oedipus and of Theseus and Ariadne.³³ In referring to the cult of the eight dead sons of Heracles at the Electran gates of Thebes, Pindar calls them bronze-armoured (or -armed, *chalkoarai*), which would imply that they were grown up at the time of their death;³⁴ it seems that he (or his source) may have altered the story to make it less shameful for Heracles, by representing his victims as having been

more than defenceless children.

Euripides provides a peculiar account of this episode, apparently of his own devising, in his surviving dramatization of it in *The Madness of Heracles*. While Heracles was away fetching Cerberos from Hades as his final labour, a certain Lycos (who was descended from the famous Lycos whose Theban career will be described in [Chapter 15](#)) killed Creon to seize power at Thebes; and Megara found herself under threat and sought refuge at the altar of Zeus with her children. On returning to find that Lycos had been planning to burn them to death, Heracles came to their rescue and killed the usurper; but he was then driven mad by Hera, who sent Lyssa (Manic Fury personified) against him, causing him to slaughter his wife and children. Having heard rumours that Heracles was under threat from Lycos, Theseus arrived at Thebes after the hero had returned to his senses and invited him back to Athens to be purified.

Heracles is instructed to perform twelve labours for Eurystheus

When Heracles returned to his right mind and realized what he had done, he went into voluntary exile, first visiting his former host Thespis, who agreed to purify him in accordance with the formal demands of Greek religion; and he then went to Delphi to ask where he should settle in the future. The Pythian priestess told him to go to Tiryns in the Argolid, where he was to live for ten years while performing a series of labours that would be imposed on him by Eurystheus, king of Mycenae; and at the same time, she was able to give him the more welcome message that he would win immortality as the fruit of his toils and humiliations.³⁵ Or, in the version offered by Nicolaus of Damascus, Eurystheus invited him to come to Tiryns when he went into exile, and he accepted the offer, remembering that Amphitryon had once received an oracle saying that Heracles would have to serve Eurystheus and would win glory as a result.³⁶ Or, in Diodorus' account, Eurystheus had summoned him to perform the labours before his madness, but Heracles had paid no attention until Zeus had let him know by some means that he would have to do so; he had then consulted the Delphic oracle, which gave him the same message as in the initial version above; and while Heracles was still reflecting on the matter (for he was understandably depressed at the thought that he would be subjected to a man who was much inferior to him), Hera sent him mad, causing him to kill his children. Heracles finally embarked on his labours after a long period of mourning.³⁷

It was sometimes claimed that the hero was originally named Acaios or Alceides after his putative grandfather, and that the Delphian priestess first conferred his familiar name on him when telling him of his forthcoming labours; in that case, Apollo is supposed to have given him the name Heracles because he would win imperishable glory, *kleos*, by doing favours, *era*, to men, i.e. through his labours (ἥρκα γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι φέρων κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔξεις).³⁸ It is certainly true that his name, which really means 'Glory of Hera', seems inappropriate for a hero who received nothing but hostility from Hera (at least until his apotheosis). Other mythographers devised various explanations, suggesting, for instance, that the Argives conferred the name on him after his first exploit in strangling the pair of snakes as a baby, to

indicate that he had gained glory, *kleos*, through *Hera* (who had sent the snakes with the intention of killing him!).³⁹

The twelve labours of Heracles

The cycle of labours

At some stage in the development of the mythology of Heracles, perhaps as late as the fifth century BC, a canonic list came to be established of the tasks that he was supposed to have performed for Eurystheus. These were known to the Greeks as the *athloi*, a term generally rendered as *labores* in Latin, hence our modern expression, ‘the labours’, although neither of these translations quite catches the flavour of the original; an *athlos* was literally a contest, especially for a prize, and by extension a struggle or ordeal that involves toil and trouble. The term could therefore be applied most appropriately to describe the arduous tasks that were performed by Heracles for Eurystheus, and all the more so because he was thought to have won immortality as the ultimate reward for his labours. Homer already uses the word (though not as yet with the latter suggestion) when referring to the harsh labours, *chalepous aethlous*, that were imposed on the hero by Eurystheus.⁴⁰ There is no reason to suppose, however, that Homer knew of any ordered cycle of labours. Although some of the exploits that were later included in the canonic cycle are recorded as early as the eighth century BC in works of art, and all but one – the clearing of the Augeian stables – are attested by the sixth century, it is not known when they first came to be classed together as a cycle of labours that he performed for Eurystheus. The full canonic sequence first appears in a series of carvings for the metopes for the temple of Zeus at Olympia, which can be dated to c. 460 BC. Some have argued that these sculptures played a decisive role in establishing the canonic list, and that the standard number was thus determined by architectural considerations; or else the sequence may have imposed itself through an earlier epic account, perhaps in the *Heracleia* of Herodotus’ uncle Panyasis; but this remains a matter for conjecture.

According to a classification that was devised by the early Greek mythographers, the exploits of Heracles could be divided into three main classes. These *athloi*, or labours, were distinguished on the one hand from the *parerga*, or incidentals, the chance adventures that befell the hero while he was performing his labours, and on the other hand from the *praxeis* or deeds, the major exploits that he performed of his own accord rather than at the order of Eurystheus. Artificial though it may have been, this scheme proved most convenient in enabling the mythographers to bring some sort of order into the mass of myth that accumulated around the hero. Legends that were located in areas associated with the labours could be bracketed with an appropriate labour as *parerga*, even if they had no original connection with that labour; and the other main deeds of the hero (apart from one or two youthful deeds set in Boeotia) could be relegated to the period after his labours as his various *praxeis*. We will now follow the labours with their associated *parerga* before passing on to the other adventures that were relegated in this way to the latter part of

Heracles' life.

While performing his labours, Heracles received his orders from Eurystheus at Mycenae but lived elsewhere, basing himself at the ancient citadel of Tiryns to the south. He was accompanied to the Argolid by his nephew Iolaos, who assisted him in his labours as his charioteer, and also his half-brother Iphicles; but Megara remained at Thebes until Heracles visited her after completing his labours to settle his marital affairs (see p. 258). According to a tradition mentioned by Apollodorus alone, the priestess at Delphi originally told the hero that he would have to perform ten labours over twelve years, but he was obliged to perform twelve labours in the end because Eurystheus refused to acknowledge two of them, objecting that Iolaos had helped him to kill the hydra (see below, p. 245) and that he had sought a fee from Augeias for clearing the Augeian stables.⁴¹

Convenient summaries of the labours are provided by Diodorus and Apollodorus.⁴² In the following account, we will consider them in the order in which they are narrated by Diodorus, although other lists or narratives show some slight variation in this respect; in particular, Heracles' journey to the Underworld to fetch Cerberos, which could certainly be regarded as his most daunting enterprise, was sometimes classed as his final labour rather than as his penultimate labour as below. The labours fall neatly into two groups of six, for the first six are set in the northern Peloponnese, no great distance from Mycenae, while the final six take the hero further abroad, initially to Crete, Thrace, and Asia Minor, and ultimately to the edges of the earth and the world below.

First labour: the Nemean lion

As his first labour, Heracles was ordered to kill the monstrous Nemean lion that lived in the mountains near Nemea in the north-western corner of the Argolid. According to Hesiod, it was the offspring of Orthos and Chimaira (or possibly Echidna, see pp. 56–7), and it was reared by Hera who caused it to roam the hills of Nemea, evidently with the intention of providing an ordeal for Heracles.⁴³ Or, in another tradition, it was a child of the moon-goddess Selene (or was at least born on the moon), and lived on the moon until Selene cast it down to the earth with a fearsome shudder at the request of Hera.⁴⁴ It was especially formidable because it was invulnerable (except perhaps in the earliest tradition, for images from the visual arts suggest that there may once have been a version in which it could be killed with a sword). Although Heracles soon discovered that its hide was impenetrable to his arrows and sword, he was able to use his club and indeed his bare hands to greater advantage. In the standard later version, he struck fear into it by threatening it with his club, causing it to flee back to its lair, a two-mouthed cave on Mt Tretos (Perforated Mountain) near Nemea; and he then blocked up one mouth of the cave before entering through the other to seize it by its neck and strangle it.⁴⁵ Or, in another account, he stunned the lion by battering it with his club at their first meeting, and then strangled it in the open air.⁴⁶

Before confronting it, Heracles had called in at Cleonai, a town not far from Nemea, and stayed with a poor labourer called MOLORCHOS, whose son had been

killed by the lion; and when Molorchos had wanted to sacrifice a ram in honour of his guest, Heracles had told him to wait for thirty days, and offer a sacrifice to Zeus the Saviour if he returned safely, or a sacrifice to himself as a hero if he should be killed during the hunt (for gods and dead heroes were both honoured in Greek cult, the latter with distinctive chthonic rites). According to the narrative associated with this story, Heracles pursued the lion for twenty-eight days and throttled it to death on the twenty-ninth day, but then promptly fell asleep from exhaustion. As soon as he awoke, however, he hoisted the lion onto his shoulders and hurried away to Cleonai, first plucking some wild parsley (*selinon*) to make a crown for the sacrifice; and he arrived back just in time to prevent Molorchos from offering sacrifice to him as a dead hero. He then reorganized the Nemean Games (which had supposedly been founded by Adrastos and the Seven, see p. 356) as a festival in honour of his father Zeus, at which the victors were awarded a crown of wild parsley from that time onwards (as was the practice in historical times) because the hero had worn a crown of it when Molorchos had offered his sacrifice to Zeus. A version of this tale was recounted by Callimachus, who is the earliest author who is known to have mentioned it.^{[47](#)}



Figure 11.2. Heracles strangles the Nemean lion. Attic amphora, circle of Exekias. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Kassel, Germany.

After killing the lion, Heracles stripped it of its hide to provide himself with his familiar costume. It furnished him with excellent protection because it was impenetrable to any weapon; there was a story that suggested, indeed, that he had no idea how to cut the hide until some god inspired him with the thought that it might at least be penetrable to the claws of the lion itself.⁴⁸ By looking out through the space left by its jaws, he could also use its scalp as a sort of helmet. In the earliest tradition, Heracles wore metallic armour like any other warrior; he is first shown wearing the lion-skin in works of art dating from the latter part of the seventh century BC, but it is not until the second half of the sixth century that the lion-skin becomes his standard form of dress in Attic vase-paintings. Pindar and Bacchylides in the following century are the first authors to indicate that the hide was impenetrable.⁴⁹ Apollodorus alone suggests that he cut his lion-skin from the lion of Cithairon (see p. 239). Heracles had provided himself with his club before setting out

to confront the lion, cutting it from a wild olive tree at Nemea on the east coast of Argos, or acquiring it by simply pulling up a whole olive tree.⁵⁰

Although Apollodorus states that he was merely ordered to fetch the lion's skin, he is usually said to have carried the lion itself to Eurystheus as proof of its death (as indeed Apollodorus describes him as doing later in his own narrative).⁵¹ Eurystheus was so alarmed by the sight of it that he refused to allow Heracles into Mycenae from that time onwards, telling him to exhibit his trophies at the city gates. For further security, the cowardly king ordered that a bronze jar should be buried in the earth for him to hide in when Heracles arrived with his more fearsome trophies, such as Cerberos or the Erymanthian boar; and he issued his orders through an intermediary henceforth, the herald Copeus (Dung-man), who is already mentioned in this connection in the *Iliad*.⁵²

Second labour: the Lernaian hydra

This was a huge, many-headed snake that lived in the swamps of Lerna some miles to the south of Argos. According to the *Theogony*, it was the offspring of Typhon and Echidna, and it was reared by Hera to become a danger to Heracles;⁵³ although Hesiod offers no description, it is regularly described as many-headed in subsequent accounts and is shown as such in visual images from the eighth century BC onwards.⁵⁴ As for the number of its heads, estimates vary from just a few to as many as fifty or a hundred. For obvious practical reasons, artists tend to portray it with relatively few heads. It was often said to have been exceptionally difficult to kill because as soon as one head was cut off, a new head, or more commonly two, would grow in its place.⁵⁵ Hydra, which simply means water snake, is not a proper name in Greek and does not necessarily carry any connotation of monstrosity.

After travelling to Lerna in his chariot with Iolaos, Heracles engaged with this formidable adversary, but soon found himself in difficulties because its heads regrew as quickly as he cut them off (or knocked them off with his club). To make matters worse, Hera provided it with an ally by sending an enormous crab to bite Heracles on the foot. He managed to kill the crab, however, by crushing it underfoot, and now felt that he was justified in calling on the help of Iolaos as an ally of his own. So Iolaos prepared some firebrands, and whenever Heracles cut off one of the hydra's heads, he would assist him by cauterizing the stump to prevent a new head (or heads) from growing. After removing its heads in this manner and killing it, Heracles dipped his arrows into its blood or gall, making them so poisonous from that time onwards that the merest scratch would prove fatal. According to Apollodorus at least, one of its heads (here nine in number) was immortal, and the hero was therefore obliged to bury it under a heavy rock.⁵⁶ Some said that Heracles called on the help of Iolaos while under joint attack from the hydra and the crab, hence the origin of the proverb 'Even Heracles cannot fight against two'.⁵⁷ In astral mythology, Hera is said to have honoured the crab by transferring it to the heavens to become the constellation of the Crab (Cancer), just as she had previously honoured the Nemean lion by turning it into the constellation of the Lion (Leo).⁵⁸

Third labour: the Erymanthian boar

This is perhaps the least interesting of all the adventures, even if it inspired some memorable images from Attic vase-painters, who liked to show Eurystheus cowering in his bronze jar as Heracles displays the boar to him. This beast, which was neither of divine origin nor gifted with any special powers, lived on Mt Erymanthos in north-western Arcadia and used to venture down to ravage the lands beneath. Having been ordered to capture it alive, Heracles frightened it out of its lair with loud shouts (or well-aimed stones) and chased it into deep snow, where he was able to net it. He then carried it back to Mycenae on his shoulders, which was quite a feat in itself.⁵⁹

Perhaps more memorable than the story of the labour itself is another tale that came to be associated with it, that of Heracles' conflict with the Centaurs. While searching for the boar, he had visited the Centaur PHOLOS, who lived in a cave on Mt Pholoe, to the south of the mountain where the boar had its lair. Pholos offered him some roast meat while eating his own meat raw (an indication of his semi-animal status), but hesitated to offer him any wine because the wine-jar in his cave was the joint property of all the Centaurs. Heracles insisted on having some wine nonetheless and opened the jar, provoking anger among the other Centaurs, who soon detected the smell of the wine and appeared at the cave, armed with rocks and uprooted fir trees. Or, in a somewhat different version, Dionysos had left the wine with a Centaur four generations earlier, ordering that it should not be opened until Heracles arrived there, but when it was now opened for him by Pholos, the sweet scent of the old wine drove the neighbouring Centaurs into such a frenzy that they thronged to the cave to seize it for themselves. A fight broke out in any case between them and Heracles, who shot some of them on the spot with his arrows and put the rest to flight. They sought refuge with Cheiron, who was a Centaur of nobler character, like Pholos. He was then living at Cape Malea at the south-east tip of the Peloponnese, after having been driven from his original home in Thessaly by the Lapiths. Heracles pursued the fleeing Centaurs all the way, and on arriving to find them cowering around Cheiron, shot an arrow at them which happened to strike Cheiron on the knee. Since the painful wound was rendered incurable by the virulent poison on Heracles' arrow (which had come from the hydra's venom), Cheiron was later happy to surrender his immortality as the price for Prometheus' release (see p. 257). Heracles then returned to Mt Pholoe to find that his host Pholos had met his death in the meantime. For while he had been examining one of Heracles' poisoned arrows, he had accidentally dropped it onto his own foot; or else he had cut himself with an arrow as he was drawing it from the body of a fallen Centaur to prepare him for burial.⁶⁰

The Centaurs were primarily associated with northern Thessaly; it was said that they took refuge in Arcadia after they were driven out of their original homeland by Peirithoos and the Lapiths (see p. 311). Of those who survived the present confrontation, Nessos settled on the river Euenos in Aetolia, where he would later have another encounter with Heracles (see p. 266), while others were received at Eleusis by Poseidon, who hid them under a mountain. There were none at all to be seen by historical times.

Fourth labour: the Cerynitian hind

The golden-horned Cerynitian (or Ceryneian) hind, which was sacred to Artemis, lived by the river Cerynites (or on Mt Ceryneia) in north-eastern Arcadia. Heracles was ordered to capture it alive; and, since it was a sacred beast, it would be improper for him to cause it even the slightest harm. According to Apollodorus, he chased it through Arcadia for an entire year until he finally brought it to the ground with a skilful arrow-shot (evidently without injuring it) as it was about to cross the river Ladon. As he was carrying it to Mycenae on his shoulders, he ran across Artemis and her brother Apollo. She reproached him for having tried to kill her sacred beast, and wanted to take it away from him, but was appeased by his explanations and allowed him to pass on his way.⁶¹ After showing the hind to Eurystheus, he set it free unharmed. Diodorus records various other ways in which he was said to have captured it, whether by the use of nets, or by tracking it down until he was able to surprise it in its sleep, or by running it down until it grew exhausted.⁶² Although the chase was confined to the central Peloponnese in the usual account, Pindar offers a more extravagant version in which Heracles pursued the beast from Arcadia to the banks of the Istros (Danube) and thence to the mythical northern land of the Hyperboreans.⁶³

As to the origin of the hind, Pindar states that Taygete, the eponym of Mt Taygetos on the western borders of Laconia (see p. 446), had dedicated it to Artemis, and had inscribed it with the name of the goddess. The poet's ancient commentators explain that Artemis had once turned Taygete into a hind to save her from being raped by Zeus, and that she had shown her gratitude afterwards by dedicating this present hind to her rescuer.⁶⁴ There is no way of telling, however, whether this was a genuinely ancient story or simply a tale that was invented by some mythographer to account for Pindar's allusion; whatever its origin, it is not easily reconciled with the commonly accepted tradition in which Taygete bore the founder of the Spartan royal line to Zeus. Callimachus offers a different account of the origin of the hind, saying that five such beasts, as large as bulls, had once lived at Parrhasia in southern Arcadia, where Artemis had caught sight of them, and had captured four of them to draw her chariot; but Hera had ensured that the fifth should escape to Mt Ceryneia to provide a labour for Heracles in the future.⁶⁵ It seems to be suggested here that the beast may have been dangerous, an idea stated more explicitly by Euripides when he remarks that it had been preying on the local people; but it was harmless in the usual tradition, and this labour differed accordingly from most as being one that had to be achieved (as Diodorus observes) through ingenuity without the use of force or the incurring of any danger.⁶⁶

Fifth labour: the Stymphalian birds

The thickly wooded shores of the Stymphalian Lake in north-eastern Arcadia provided a perfect habitat for huge flocks of birds. As his next labour, Heracles was ordered to drive them all away. The birds were not dangerous in the original story; they look rather like geese in vase-paintings, with short bodies and long necks. They could be expected to present a problem to Heracles simply because there were so

many of them. In literary accounts, the hero frightened the birds out of their coverts by creating a din with a bronze rattle or castanets, and then shot them down with his arrows as they rose up into the air. Or, in an early version by the epic poet Pisander of Rhodes, he merely frightened them away without killing them. There was disagreement on whether he made the bird-scarer himself or received it as a gift from Athena, who had acquired it from Hephaistos. It makes no appearance in vase-paintings and other visual images, which simply show the hero shooting the birds with his arrows, or attacking them with his club, or a sling, or indeed his bare hands.⁶⁷ By mentioning the Stymphalian birds in connection with the birds of the island of Ares in the Black Sea, which could shoot out their feathers like arrows (see p. 404), Apollonius was indirectly responsible for some late reports that attribute this capacity to the Arcadian birds.⁶⁸ Pausanias is certainly following a late tradition when he describes them as man-eaters, and compares them to some alarming Arabian birds that could peck through armour made of bronze or iron.⁶⁹

Sixth labour: the Augeian stables

AUGEIAS, son of Helios (the Sun), who ruled at Elis in the north-western Peloponnese, was the proud owner of vast herds of cattle (which had been presented by his divine father in some accounts). Since their stables, or more accurately, enclosures, had been left uncleared for a long time, a vast quantity of dung had accumulated, and Heracles was now ordered to clear it away in a single day. Before setting to work, he negotiated a fee, asking that he should be given a tenth of the cattle (or part of the kingdom) in return, which Augeias was happy to promise because he was unable to believe that the task could be fully completed. Rather than attempting to achieve it by hand, which would doubtless have been as impractical as it was humiliating, Heracles devised a more ingenious approach by diverting a local river (or rivers) through the enclosures to wash away the dung. In different accounts, he diverted the Peneios and Alpheios, the two main rivers of the area, for this purpose, or the Alpheios alone, or else the Manios, a tributary of the Alpheios that ran through the city of Elis.

Heracles returned to Augeias in triumph to claim his fee, only to find that the king had learned in the meantime that he was acting under order from Eurystheus, and now refused to pay him for work that he would have had to perform in any case. He even went so far as to deny that he had ever promised him a reward and declared that he would be ready to submit to arbitration; but when the matter was brought forward to be judged, his own son, Phyleus, testified on behalf of Heracles, saying that a reward had indeed been offered. Or else Phyleus himself acted as arbitrator and judged in favour of Heracles, or simply criticized his father for repaying a benefit with an injury. Augeias continued to refuse to pay the reward in any case and expelled his son from the kingdom. Homer may have been acquainted with this story, in some form at least, since he mentions that Phyleus went into exile after quarrelling with his father. Never being ready to submit to a slight, Heracles returned to Elis to exact vengeance after completing his labours, killed Augeias, and summoned Phyleus back to take over the throne (see pp. 262–3).⁷⁰

After leaving Elis, Heracles visited DEXAMENOS, who was king of the city of Olenos in Achaea, the northernmost province of the Peloponnese. On finding that the king was being compelled to give his daughter in marriage to a Centaur called EURYTION, the hero came to his aid by killing the Centaur when he arrived to fetch his bride. Or else he killed the Centaur when he tried to force himself on the king's daughter at her wedding-feast, when she was marrying Azan (an Arcadian ruler, see p. 548). This was a story of some antiquity that was recounted in a lost poem by Bacchylides.⁷¹

A comical tale of an eating-contest came to be attached to this labour. When Heracles tried to claim his reward for clearing the stables, a certain LEPREOS (the eponym of Eleian town of Lepreon or Lepreos) advised Augeias to throw him into chains. Aggrieved by the insult, Heracles went to visit him at his home afterwards to teach him a lesson; but he agreed to be reconciled with him at the urging of his mother, and then proceeded to compete with him in a series of contests, in throwing the discus, in bailing-out water, and in seeing who could consume a whole ox in the shortest time. Lepreos was inevitably defeated every time, and when he was defeated once again in a drinking-contest, he lost his temper and provoked his own death by challenging Heracles to single combat.⁷² Or, in another version, Lepreos was able to match Heracles in gluttony in an ox-eating contest, became overconfident as a result, and then dared to challenge him to a duel.⁷³

Seventh labour: the Cretan bull

According to the usual tradition, this was the bull that had been sent up from the sea by Poseidon in response to the prayers of Minos, but had later been turned wild by the god after Minos had failed to sacrifice it to him (see p. 269); in that case, it should certainly have been exceptionally difficult to capture. Or, in a divergent account by the early Argive mythographer Acusilaus,⁷⁴ it was the bull that had carried Europa to Crete (see p. 288; usually regarded as having been Zeus himself in animal form). Heracles was ordered to bring it back alive. Although Diodorus states that he was helped in the enterprise by Minos, Apollodorus says quite the opposite, reporting that he sought the help of Minos but was told to tackle the beast on his own. For information on how he was supposed to have achieved this, we have to rely on vase-paintings, which indicate that he wrestled the bull to its knees and hobbled it. Diodorus reports that he rode through the sea to the Peloponnese on its back. He showed it to Eurystheus and then let it go; it wandered about for some time, finally taking up residence at Marathon in northern Attica, where it was subsequently killed by Theseus (see p. 294–5).⁷⁵ Or, in some Latin accounts, Heracles killed it, or Eurystheus was tactless enough to dedicate it to Hera, who drove it away to Attica because it witnessed to the glory of Heracles.⁷⁶

Eighth labour: the horses of Diomedes

As his next labour, Heracles was sent north to fetch the savage horses of DIOMEDES, son of Ares, the king of the Bistones in Thrace. The four horses in question, which

would have formed Diomedes' chariot-team, were fed on human flesh; they are commonly described as mares (even if Hyginus, the only author to name them, happens to give them masculine names, Podargos, Lampon, Xanthos, and Dinos).⁷⁷ In what was probably the oldest form of the story, as attested by Pindar and Euripides, the hero achieved the task on his own. Although the relevant fragment from Pindar is poorly preserved, it would seem that Heracles threw some unfortunate person to the horses to distract them while he was harnessing them; and Diomedes was apparently killed while trying to oppose him. Euripides refers to the blood-caked stables of the horses and mentions that Heracles tamed them and drove them back to Mycenae in a four-horse chariot.⁷⁸ Heracles seems to have been unaccompanied in Diodorus' account also. After reporting that the horses' feeding-troughs were made from bronze and that the animals were fastened to them by iron chains, Diodorus explains that Heracles tamed them by throwing their own master to them, and so restoring them to docility by feeding them on the flesh of the man who had taught them their unnatural practices.⁷⁹

In the other main version of the story, as recounted by Apollodorus, Heracles sailed to Thrace with a company of volunteers, also taking his young favourite ABDEROS, who was a son of Hermes from Opous in Eastern Locris. After overpowering the men who were in charge of the stables, Heracles seized the mares and led them down towards the sea; but Diomedes and his followers came to recover them before he could sail away, and he left them in the charge of Abderos while he was confronting the enemy force. Heracles soon killed Diomedes and put the Bistonians to flight, but he returned to find that Abderos had been killed by the horses in the meantime. So he buried him at the spot and founded the city of Abdera in his memory (on the northern coast of the Aegean about halfway between the Chalcidice and the Hellespont). He then took the horses to Eurystheus, who set them free.⁸⁰ They wandered north towards their homeland until they arrived at Mt Olympos where they were torn apart by wild beasts; or, according to Diodorus, Eurystheus dedicated them to Hera and their breed persisted until the time of Alexander the Great.⁸¹ Ovid and Hyginus state that Heracles slaughtered them, but this was evidently a late development.⁸² It was during his journey to Thrace that Heracles rescued Alcestis from death in Euripides' account of her story (see p. 146).

Ninth labour: the belt of Hippolyte

As his next labour, Heracles went to the land of the Amazons to fetch the belt or 'girdle' of their queen, HIPPOLYTE. This was a heavy warrior's belt (*zōstēr*) rather than the light girdle that would have formed part of the ordinary clothing of women; Apollodorus calls it the belt of Ares and indicates that it was a symbol of Hippolyte's sovereignty.⁸³ Although the same author goes on to explain that Eurystheus sent for it because his daughter Admete wanted to acquire it, such an object would have been desirable in itself and well suited to serve as a token of success; and it need not be assumed that any such explanation would have been offered or required in the early tradition. According to Euripides, the belt was deposited at Mycenae, presumably at the Heraion, along with a gold-spangled robe that had belonged to the

queen.⁸⁴

The land of the Amazons was usually thought to lie on the southern shores of the Black Sea, in the north-eastern corner of Asia Minor; after having undertaken labours in the south and north, Heracles now set out for the east. In the simplest version of the story, as found in Apollonius, he gained the belt on his own and without bloodshed, by capturing the queen's sister MELANIPPE in an ambush and then ransoming her in exchange for the belt.⁸⁵ It seems to have been commonly believed, however, that he sailed to the area with a force of allies, and engaged the Amazons in a battle at which he either seized the belt or captured the enemy commander, Melanippe, to ransom her for the belt. The battle is a very popular subject in vase-paintings from the first half of the sixth century BC onwards (although there is no indication that a belt plays any special part in the story, and the specific opponent of Heracles is generally a certain Andromache, if any name is marked). Theseus was sometimes said to have accompanied Heracles as one of his allies (see p. 309).⁸⁶

Apollodorus offers a distinctive account of this labour, saying that Hippolyte visited Heracles' ship to enquire about the reason for his visit after he called in at Themiscyra, the main city of the Amazons on the river Thermodon. She promised to give him the belt, and the matter might have been settled amicably if it had not been for the machinations of Hera, who mingled with Hippolyte's followers in the guise of an Amazon and told them that their queen was being abducted. They rode down to the ship fully armed as a consequence, causing Heracles to believe that treachery was afoot. So he killed Hippolyte, stripped her of the belt, and confronted the Amazons in battle before sailing off with his trophy.⁸⁷

While sailing to (or from) this labour, Heracles saved Hesione, the daughter of the king of Troy, from being devoured by a sea-monster after having been promised some divine cattle as a reward; but once he had done so, her father Laomedon refused to pay the reward, which would have serious consequences for him and his family because the hero returned to Troy to exact a devastating revenge after completing his labours (see p. 260). Apollodorus may be consulted for various minor episodes that came to be associated with Heracles' voyage to Asia.

Tenth labour: the cattle of Geryon

The monstrous GERYON (or Geryoneus, or Geryones), who was three men joined into one, has already been mentioned as a child of Chrysaor (see pp. 55–6); Heracles was ordered to fetch Geryon's cattle from his home island of Erytheia (Red Island), which lay in the outer Ocean towards the sunset in the far west. The hero travelled out through North Africa, killing many wild beasts on the way to prepare the area for human settlement. As he was approaching the western bounds of Africa, he became exasperated by the heat of the sun and aimed his bow threateningly at the sun-god Helios, who was so impressed by his audacity that he offered him the use of his golden cup to take him across the Ocean to Erytheia.⁸⁸ This was the remarkable vessel in which Helios used to travel around the Ocean each night from the place of his setting to that of his rising (see p. 42). So Heracles took the cup from Oceanos or from the sea-god Nereus,⁸⁹ evidently during the daytime while Helios was not using

it, and reached Erytheia with greater ease than he might have expected. According to Pherecydes, Oceanos tried to test his nerve by raising a heavy swell, but gave up in alarm when the hero threatened him with his bow.⁹⁰

On reaching Erytheia (which originally lay in a purely fabulous realm, but was later thought to lie somewhere off the coast of southern Spain), Heracles set up camp on a mountain and awaited an opportunity to steal the cattle, which were purple in colour and were guarded by the herdsman Eurytion and the monstrous dog Orthos or Orthros (see p. 56), which had two or more heads. The dog soon detected the presence of the stranger and rushed to the attack, but was clubbed to death by Heracles, who also killed Eurytion when he came to the aid of the beast. On learning of the disturbance from Menoitios, who was pasturing the cattle of Hades on the island, Geryon set off in search of Heracles and found him driving the cattle away along the side of a river. A fierce fight ensued in which Geryon was shot dead. Making use of the cup of Helios once again, Heracles ferried the stolen cattle across to the Iberian coast, and then drove them across the Pyrenees and through southern Europe to Greece, visiting Italy and Sicily on the way.⁹¹

We must now consider some of the many adventures with which Heracles became involved while he was travelling to the far west and back again. His outward journey was comparatively uneventful (unless he was confronted by Antaios and Bousiris at this time, as Diodorus suggests, rather than during his journey to the Hesperides, see p. 256). It was commonly claimed that on reaching the western end of the Libyan (i.e. North African) coast, he raised the Pillars of Heracles to mark the western boundaries of the inhabited world.⁹² These were usually identified with the Rock of Gibraltar (known as Mt Calpe) and the mountain above Ceuta (known as Mt Abile) on either side of the Straits of Gibraltar; and some claimed that Heracles also opened up the straits on this occasion to provide an outlet to the Ocean, or else narrowed the existing straits to make them impassable to the monsters of the Ocean.⁹³ In another account, the pillar-rocks were raised in the very earliest times by Briareos (one of the Hundred-Handers, see pp. 24–5) and were later dedicated to Heracles in recognition of his services;⁹⁴ or else the pillars of Heracles were ordinary pillars that stood in the temple of Melkart, a Phoenician god who was identified with Heracles, at Gadeira (Cadiz) in southern Iberia.⁹⁵

Heracles met with trouble quite frequently during his return journey because people were tempted to steal from the herd that he was driving through their lands. The Ligurians of southern France, for instance, attacked him for that reason not far from the city of Arles (which he was said to have founded, naming it Alesia in memory of his wandering, *alē*). Although he tried to repel them by use of his bow, he ran out of arrows and prayed for help to his father Zeus, who rained vast quantities of pebbles from the sky, enabling him to pelt his attackers with them until they withdrew. The area now known as the Plaine de la Crau, which is covered by masses of pebbles that reduce it to barrenness, was pointed out as the very spot where this wonder took place.⁹⁶

Once Erytheia came to be pictured as lying off the west coast of Spain, it could be supposed that the return journey of Heracles must have taken him past Italy, and an opportunity was thus provided for the development of legends, mainly aetiological in

nature, that brought him into connection with Italy and Sicily. Although these are neglected by Apollodorus, who concentrated primarily on early myth, a conveniently accessible anthology is provided by Diodorus, who was naturally interested in such stories as a Greek Sicilian.⁹⁷ Heracles was said to have travelled right down to the toe of Italy, passing through the site of Rome on the way, until he finally arrived at Rhegion (Rhegium, modern Reggio) on the Italian shore of the Straits of Messina, where a bull broke free and swam across to Sicily. Because Heracles wandered around everywhere asking the local people whether they had seen a missing bull-calf (*italos*, or *vitulus* under the corresponding Latin name), Italy now came to acquire the name by which it has been known ever since. It was also explained that Rhegion came to be called by that name because the bull ‘broke away’ there (as though the name were derived from the Greek verb *rhēgnumi* or *aporhēgnumi*).⁹⁸

Finding no sign of the bull in Italy, Heracles crossed over to Sicily, where he discovered that ERYX, a local ruler in the west of the island, had gained possession of the beast and had mixed it among his own livestock. This Eryx was the eponym of the Sicilian mountain of that name (now Mt San Giuliano), which was the site of an important sanctuary of Aphrodite; and it was claimed accordingly that Eryx was a son of that goddess, either by Boutes, an Argonaut whom she had rescued (see p. 409) or by Poseidon. When he refused to surrender the bull unless Heracles could defeat him in a wrestling match, the hero forced him to the ground three times (the usual condition for a victory) before proceeding to kill him.⁹⁹ Or, in another account, Heracles was challenged to a wrestling match by Eryx while he was travelling through the island with the cattle of Geryon, and he wrestled with the king on the agreement that he would gain the kingdom if he won, but would surrender the cattle if he lost; after defeating Eryx, he entrusted the kingdom to the local people on condition that they would hand it over if any of Heracles’ descendants should arrive in the area in the future to claim it. Dorieus, a member of the historical royal family of Sparta (which was supposedly descended from Heracles, see pp. 280–1), came to Sicily towards the end of the sixth century BC and actually laid claim to the territory on these grounds (but was soon killed by enemies within the island).¹⁰⁰

After crossing back to Italy, Heracles arrived at the site of the future city of Croton (which was founded by Achaeans from the Peloponnese at the end of the eighth century BC), where he received a friendly welcome from the local ruler, Croton son of Phaiax (a brother of Alcinoos, see p. 510 who had come from the remote island of Pheacia, as the name of his father might suggest); but when a certain Lacinios or Lacinus tried to steal some of his cattle during his visit, a confrontation developed in which the hero accidentally killed his host. By way of atonement, he built a tomb for him and offered him a splendid funeral, foretelling that a famous city would be founded there long afterwards under Croton’s name.¹⁰¹ An almost identical tale was told of Epizephyrean Locri further down the coast (a city founded from Locris at much same period as Croton). For the hero was said to have killed the city’s eponym, Locros, son of Phaiax, while trying to prevent an adventurer called Latinos from stealing his cattle. In this case, Heracles himself was said to have ordered the founding of the city at a later time after he had become a god on Olympos, indicating his divine will through an oracle.¹⁰²

Other legends were developed to link features of the local landscape to the hero's passage. While he was passing along the Sicilian coast, for instance, the nymphs of the area caused warm springs to gush forth to allow him to gain refreshment from the toil of his journey, hence the origin of the baths at Himera and Segesta.¹⁰³ By far the most famous of these aetiological legends, however, and the most interesting, is the one that was devised to account for the oldest cult of Heracles (or Hercules in Latin) at Rome, at the Ara Maxima (Greatest Altar) in the Forum Boarium. Originally a private cult administered by two old patrician families, the Potitii and the Pinarii, it was considered to be of venerable antiquity (even if it cannot really have been so very ancient since Greek rites were practised at it). So what could be more natural than to imagine that it might have been founded by Heracles/Hercules himself in the very earliest times while he was in Italy, before he was a god and before the city yet existed?

As he was resting by the Tiber with the cattle, so the story goes, a monster or brigand of the area called CACUS caught sight of the beasts from his lair on the Palatine hill (or the Aventine in one version) and stole some of them while the hero was lying asleep. Dragging them tail-foremost to his cave, he blocked up the entrance with a huge boulder and awaited the departure of their owner. Although Hercules (as we may call him in this context) noticed their absence and tried to find them, he failed in his efforts because all the tracks seemed to lead away from the cave, and he was finally obliged set off without them. As he was driving the remaining beasts away, however, some of them began to low and their fellows within the cave (or just one of them) bellowed in reply. Hastily seizing his club, Hercules rushed up the hillside towards the source of the noise, forced his way into the cave, and cudgelled or throttled Cacus to death to recover the cattle. In the traditional version, Cacus was a fire-breathing monster of semi-human appearance who tried to defend himself by spewing out blasts of flame; or, in rationalistic accounts, he was simply a ruffian of exceptional size. On hearing of the death of Cacus, Evander (Euandros in Greek), an Arcadian who was said to have ruled at the site at that time, approached Hercules to express his gratitude, and reported that his mother (who was a prophetic nymph) had foretold that Hercules was destined to be raised to the heavens as a god. Wanting to be the first to pay him divine honours, Evander raised the Ara Maxima to him as his first altar and sacrificed a calf to him; or, in another version, Hercules, who was never noted for his modesty, raised the altar in his own honour in response to the prophecy.¹⁰⁴ To explain why the cult was originally controlled by the Potitii and Pinarii (until it was taken over by the state towards the end of the fourth century BC), some authors added that Hercules instructed members of these two families in the Greek rites that were to be practised there.¹⁰⁵

Although it was once widely argued that this tale of cattle-thievery was an ancient myth that was developed independently at Rome in accordance with a common Indo-European pattern, it is far more likely that it was an antiquarian legend of fairly late invention that was modelled on the various Greek tales (some quite old) in which people of a number of regions were said to have tried to rob the hero of his cattle during his long journey. Cacus himself was of Italian origin as

would be expected. Although he appears as a seer in Etruscan images, he was apparently honoured as a fire-deity in early Rome in conjunction with a female counterpart called Caca. He was associated with the Palatine hill in particular (even if Vergil transfers his cave to the Aventine); a flight of steps known as the Scala Caci or 'Steps of Cacus' was cut into southern flank of the hill, leading up from the Circus Maximus. As a godling who was associated with fire, Cacus could easily be transformed into a fire-breathing monster who could serve as a worthy opponent for Hercules; and the fact that his name could be equated with *kakos*, the Greek adjective for bad or evil, may have encouraged this reinterpretation of his nature. The most imaginative detail in the resulting story, the monster's ruse in making the cattle walk backwards to his cave, was surely recycled from the famous episode in early Greek myth in which Hermes tried to conceal his theft of Apollo's cattle by that means (see p. 173).

After his Italian detour, Heracles drove the cattle around the top of the Adriatic and down towards Greece. But as he was doing so, Hera tried to frustrate him by sending a gadfly against the cattle, causing them to disperse among the foothills of the mountains of Thrace. With much difficulty, Heracles collected most of them together again, even if a few were left behind to become the ancestors of the wild cattle of Thrace. When he finally arrived in Mycenae, he delivered the cattle to Eurystheus, who sacrificed them to Hera.¹⁰⁶

According to a picturesque tale recounted by Herodotus, Heracles' travels took him to Scythia, where a viper-woman stole his chariot-horses and demanded that he should sleep with her as a condition for their return. She was formed like an ordinary woman from the buttocks upwards, but otherwise like a snake. She managed to detain him in Scythia for some time, bearing him three sons, Agathyrsos, Gelanos, and Scythes; and when the time came for him to depart, he left one of his bows and a sword-belt behind, telling her that the kingdom should go to the son who could draw the bow and put on the sword-belt in the proper way. When it later turned out that only the youngest, Scythes, was able to do so, she drove the other two away in obedience to their father's orders. The three brothers were the eponymous mythical ancestors of the Scythians and two neighbouring peoples, the Agathyrsoi and Gelanoi; and the story explained the origin of the distinctive Scythian bow, which resembled the bow that was supposed to have been used by Heracles.¹⁰⁷

Eleventh labour: the fetching of Cerberos

The most daunting of the labours of Heracles is also the one that can be traced to the earliest period, since the *Iliad* already mentions how 'Eurystheus sent him down to the house of Hades, keeper of the gates, to fetch the hound of hateful Hades from Erebos'. The Homeric epics also report that he received invaluable assistance from Athena and Hermes.¹⁰⁸ He descended to the nether regions through the route that was most commonly favoured by mythical adventurers, the bottomless cave at Cape Tainaron in the southern Peloponnese.¹⁰⁹ According to late Latin sources, the ferryman Charon was so alarmed to see him that he agreed to take him across to the land of the dead even though he was still alive, and was punished for this breach of

his duties by being thrown into chains for a year.¹¹⁰ Apollodorus remarks that the shades all fled at the sight of the hero, with the exception of Meleager and the Gorgon Medusa. The story of his encounter with Meleager is recounted in full in an ode of Bacchylides, who describes how Meleager told him the sad story of his premature death, causing him to weep for the only time in his life, and recommended his sister Deianeira to him as a wife (advice that the hero would eventually follow, see p. 264).¹¹¹ As for the Gorgon, Heracles drew his sword as if to fend her off until Hermes advised him that she was merely a harmless phantom. As he advanced further into the land of the dead, he came across Theseus and Peirithoos, who had been imprisoned there ever since they had entered Hades alive with the crazy intent of abducting Persephone (see p. 314); and he raised Theseus up from his seat to set him free (along with Peirithoos in some accounts). He also tried to help Ascalaphos, an inhabitant of the Underworld who had been buried under a stone by Demeter (see further on p. 97). Wanting to procure blood for the shades (to restore their wits, see p. 103), he slaughtered some of the cattle of Hades, to the anger of their herdsman Menoitios, who challenged him to a wrestling match; Heracles seized Menoitios in a firm grip and broke his ribs, but was obliged to let go of him when Persephone intervened.¹¹²

Cerberos would not allow himself to be captured without a struggle, and he was a formidable opponent even for the greatest of heroes, for he was not only large and powerful but had three heads (in the usual tradition at least) and a snake in his tail. The literary accounts of this episode are all relatively late. According to Apollodorus, Heracles asked Hades for permission to remove him, and was told that he could take him if he could overpower him without using any weapons; trusting to the protection of his breastplate and lion-skin (which was of course impenetrable), he seized Cerberos' head in his arms and gripped him tightly, ignoring the bites that he was receiving from the snake in his tail, until the beast submitted.¹¹³ Or, in a slightly different version in which Heracles was ordered to overpower him without using his shield or metallic weapons, he used his lion-skin for a shield and intimidated him by hurling sharp stones at him (or perhaps shooting stone-tipped arrows); and when Hades tried to obstruct him after he had seized the beast, he was understandably annoyed and threatened the god with his bow.¹¹⁴ Diodorus is exceptional in suggesting that Persephone delivered Cerberos to him ready chained.¹¹⁵ The visual record takes us back to the sixth century BC, for vase-paintings from that period show Heracles confronting or pacifying the dog, often with Hermes or Athena (or both) standing by or even assisting. Other images show the hero approaching Persephone or Hades beforehand; since one or the other of them is sometimes shown watching as he pacifies Cerberos, it would seem that he was thought to have gained their permission beforehand as in the preceding literary accounts.

After successfully intimidating or mollifying Cerberos, Heracles brought him up to the world above to show him to Eurystheus, ascending at Tainaron (or through the temple of Artemis at Troizen, or through a cleft in the earth at Hermione nearby, or through a bottomless cave at Heracleia by the Black Sea¹¹⁶). As soon as he had proved the success of his mission, causing Eurystheus a considerable fright as he did

so, he returned Cerberos to the gates of Hades to allow him to resume his normal duties.

It was said that Heracles had himself initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries to prepare for his journey to Hades, which would have been a good idea because initiates could expect to be assured of a better fate in the Underworld (although normally after their death of course). Since strangers from beyond the borders of Attica were not yet allowed to be initiated, he had to be adopted beforehand by a local man called Pyllos; and since he was still polluted moreover as a result of having slaughtered the Centaurs (see p. 246), Demeter now founded the lesser mysteries (preliminary rites conducted at Agriai just outside Athens) to purify him from the bloodshed.¹¹⁷ In historical times anyone who spoke Greek could be initiated unless polluted by murder. Various other minor tales also came to be attached to this myth; it was claimed, for instance, that the notoriously poisonous aconite or wolfsbane originally sprang from the gall that Cerberos spewed up when he first arrived in the upper world.¹¹⁸

Twelfth labour: the apples of the Hesperides

As his final labour (or his penultimate labour in some accounts, before his descent to Hades), Heracles was ordered to fetch some of the golden apples of the Hesperides. These grew on a wondrous tree (or trees) in the garden of the gods at the edges of the earth, where they were guarded by a group of beautiful nymphs, the HESPERIDES (see p. 59), and protected by a huge snake, sometimes named as Ladon in the later tradition.¹¹⁹ To discover the way to this remote and mysterious place, Heracles consulted the nymphs of the Eridanos (a mythical river that came to be identified with the Po, see p. 40), who advised him to question Nereus, the old man of the sea; so he seized Nereus while he was asleep and kept him tied up as he repeatedly transformed himself, refusing to release him until he revealed the proper route.¹²⁰

The Hesperides would traditionally have lived in the far west, as is indicated in their name (daughters of the evening), their proximity to Atlas (see below) and various other factors. In that case, Heracles would have had to make his way to the north-western corner of Africa. In the accounts offered by Pherecydes and Apollodorus,¹²¹ however, he travels to the northern fringes of the world by a strangely circuitous route: starting near the Ocean in the west, he travels across the whole breadth of Africa until he reaches the encircling Ocean again on the opposite side of the world, and sails around it to the Caucasus, where he meets Prometheus, and then proceeds on foot towards Atlas and the Hesperides, here located in the remote north near the Hyperboreans. This relocation was evidently thought necessary because of the role that Prometheus, as a prisoner in the Caucasus, was supposed to have played in this version of the story (see below, p. 257).

We will begin by tracing in greater detail the outward journey as it is described in this latter version. The curious route makes some sort of sense if it is remembered that the present starting-point by the Ocean would have been the original goal of the journey, and that Heracles would originally have travelled *west* through Africa to

reach it. Here too, of course, he must initially have passed west by some route after questioning Nereus. Setting off from Tartessos in southern Iberia, Heracles first travelled through North Africa to Egypt, encountering the Libyan giant ANTAIOS on the way. Antaios used to force passing strangers to wrestle with him, and he killed every one of them until Heracles arrived; Pindar adds that he would take their skulls to roof the temple of Poseidon¹²² (who was commonly regarded as his father). According to a familiar story that first appears in Roman sources, he could not be defeated by any ordinary wrestler because his strength increased whenever he came into contact with the ground.¹²³ Reversing the normal procedure in a wrestling match, in which victory would be achieved by forcing the loser to the ground, Heracles heaved him up from the ground accordingly and crushed him in his arms until he was dead.¹²⁴ Although this feature of Antaios' legend presumably originated in Greece, perhaps in the Hellenistic period, nothing is known for certain about its time of origin; there is no unequivocal evidence for it in the arts prior to its appearance in literary accounts by Ovid and Lucan. It was explained that Antaios was a son of Earth and gained added strength through her touch, as is already stated by Ovid.¹²⁵

According to Pindar and Pherecydes, Antaios lived at Irasa near Cyrene, in the region of North Africa that lay immediately to the west of Egypt; and the latter author reports that Heracles slept with his wife Iphinoe after his death, fathering a son by her named Palaimon ('Wrestler', also a cultic title of the hero himself).¹²⁶ According to a later tradition, however, Antaios was married to Tinge, the eponym of Tingis, now Tangier, on the Strait of Gibraltar, and Heracles fathered Sophax by her, the mythical ancestor of the kings of Mauretania, the westernmost province of North Africa.¹²⁷ The legend was thus altered and shifted to the west to enable the Mauretanian royal family to claim descent from the great hero. Sophax was presumably named after Syphax, a great Numidian potentate of the third century BC. The supposed tomb of Tinge could be seen near Tangier. According to a none-too-serious tale, Heracles was tied down by Pygmies while he was lying asleep after his encounter with Antaios (see p. 573).

After arriving in Egypt, Heracles fell under threat from yet another son of Poseidon, the fictional pharaoh BOUSIRIS, who seized and imprisoned him with the intention of bringing him to sacrifice, as was his usual practice with strangers. The name of Bousiris was derived from that of a town in the Nile delta, Per-Usire or the House of Osiris, and he was said to have been borne to Poseidon by Lysianassa, a daughter of Epaphos, even though Epaphos, as the son of Io (see p. 215), must have lived many generations earlier. When the kingdom of Bousiris had once remained barren for nine years, a seer from Cyprus, a certain Phrasios, had revealed that fertility would be restored if a male visitor from abroad were to be sacrificed to Zeus every year; and after initiating the process by slaughtering the seer himself, Bousiris had continued to sacrifice foreigners ever since. Heracles broke his shackles, however, as he was being brought to the altar, and killed Bousiris along with his son.¹²⁸

The geography of Heracles' journey becomes somewhat confused at that point. According to Pherecydes (if the surviving summary can be trusted) he now made his

way to Thebes (i.e. up the Nile to Upper Egypt) and across some mountains to 'outer Libya', which he cleared of wild beasts by use of his bow.¹²⁹ Diodorus states quite similarly that he travelled up the Nile to Ethiopia, where he killed the local ruler EMATHION, son of Eos, when subjected to an unprovoked attack from him.¹³⁰ In the rather muddled account by Apollodorus (who also mentions a journey to Rhodes), he killed Emathion after passing by Arabia, and then journeyed through Libya to the outer sea.¹³¹ Taking these reports together, it makes some sense to imagine him travelling south through Egypt to the edge of the unknown, and then across to some ill-defined imaginary East Africa (or Outer Libya) adjoining the outer Ocean. He arrived somewhere on the eastern shores of Africa in any case and borrowed the cup of Helios once again to sail north around the outer Ocean until he arrived at the Caucasus. Prometheus had been chained to a cliff in the Caucasus ever since he had incurred the anger of Zeus by stealing fire for mortals (see p. 87); and he was subjected to ever-renewed torment, for an eagle would peck each day at his liver, which grew anew each night. Heracles took pity on him and shot the eagle, and then sought the permission of Zeus to set him free entirely.¹³²

According to Apollodorus, he achieved this by presenting Cheiron to Zeus as an immortal being who was willing to die in place of Prometheus. Now Cheiron, as we have seen just above (see p. 246), had been suffering unendurable pain ever since Heracles had accidentally wounded him with one of his poisoned arrows; and Apollodorus writes in this connection that 'he wanted to die, but was unable to because he was immortal – only when Prometheus offered himself to Zeus to become immortal in his place was he able to die'.¹³³ Since Prometheus was of divine birth, this cannot be literally interpreted as meaning that Cheiron exchanged his immortality for the mortality of Prometheus; nor could it easily be explained in that case why Zeus should have agreed to the release of Prometheus as a consequence. We are surely intended to suppose that by accepting death as an immortal being, Cheiron is in some sense taking over the punishment of Prometheus, who is therefore permitted to resume his normal existence as a god. Confirmation for this idea can be found in some lines from *Prometheus Bound*, in which Hermes tells Prometheus that he can have no hope of release 'until some god reveals himself ready to take on your sufferings and descend of his own free will to sunless Hades'.¹³⁴ Although it might have seemed almost impossible that any immortal being would agree to sacrifice himself in this way, Cheiron was now willing to surrender his life as the price that he would have to pay if he was to be released from the intolerable pain of his wound.

Prometheus repaid Heracles for his services by advising him on how he could best achieve his quest. He suggested that the hero should not attempt to fetch the apples himself, but should ask Atlas to do so on his behalf, offering to take over the burden of the sky in the meantime. Happy to be released from his exertions for a while, Atlas set off on his way, procured three apples from the Hesperides, and brought them back to Heracles; but he was understandably reluctant to return to his arduous duty, and asked Heracles to continue to hold the sky for the present, saying that he himself would take the apples to Eurystheus. Prometheus had foreseen that this might happen, however, and had suggested an appropriate ruse to Heracles, who tricked Atlas into taking the sky back by asking him to hold it for a moment while he

prepared a pad for his head. The artistic evidence indicates that this version of the story, which is first recounted by Pherecydes, was familiar by the middle of the sixth century BC.¹³⁵

In the other main version, which first appears in tragedy but can again be traced further back in the visual arts, Heracles plucked the apples himself after killing the dragon that guarded them.¹³⁶ This would almost certainly have been the original version of the legend. Although the literary sources offer no details on the killing, we can imagine it clearly enough from depictions in vase-paintings, which show the hero raising his club against the snake as it entwines itself around the apple tree. In astral mythology, Zeus is said to have placed an image of the confrontation among the stars, representing Heracles as the constellation Engonasin (the Kneeler, now known as Hercules), in which he can be seen kneeling on one leg as he aims his club at the serpent as represented in the neighbouring constellation Draco.¹³⁷ Considering that the snake was no harmful monster but a servant of the gods that was protecting divine property, it might be thought that it would be improper for Heracles to kill it; and in a version that is recorded in vase-paintings and other images from the fifth century onwards, the killing is indeed suppressed, and Heracles acquires the apples in a peaceable manner from the Hesperid nymphs. That was the way, incidentally, in which Atlas was said to have procured them.

After winning possession of the apples, whether in person or through the good services of Atlas, Heracles took them back to Mycenae and presented them to Eurystheus. As soon as Eurystheus was assured that the labour had been fulfilled, he returned the apples to Heracles, who passed them on to Athena to be taken back to the garden of the gods, because they were too holy to be left anywhere else.¹³⁸ By the completion of his final labour (whether the fetching of the apples, as here, or the fetching of Cerberos as in the other tradition), Heracles freed himself forever from his servitude to the ignoble Eurystheus.

Heracles' servitude to Omphale and major campaigns

Heracles tries to win Iole as his wife, murders her brother Iphitos, and is enslaved to Omphale

Now that Heracles was able to turn his thoughts to personal matters, he decided that the time had come for him to seek a new wife and found a new family. Since there could be no question of him returning to his original wife after killing the children of their union, he first travelled to Thebes to settle his affairs with Megara by arranging for her to marry his nephew Iolaos;¹³⁹ and having heard that EURYTOS, king of Oichalia, was offering his daughter IOLE to anyone who could defeat him and his sons in at archery, he travelled on to Oichalia (apparently in Euboea, see pp. 267–8) to take up the challenge. We have already encountered Eurytos as the man who instructed the young Heracles in archery (see p. 238); his father Melaneus was a son of the archer-god Apollo. Although Heracles defeated Eurytos and his sons in the contest, the king refused to surrender his daughter to him, saying that he feared that the hero might kill her children if she should bear any to him, just as he had killed

the children of his previous marriage. Eurytos was supported in his decision by all his sons apart from the eldest, IPHITOS, who argued that Iole should be handed over in accordance with the terms of the contest. Angry though he was, Heracles was obliged to depart without her, but vowed to return to seek revenge when circumstances permitted.¹⁴⁰ As events turned out, his return would be delayed for many years, until long after he had taken another woman, Deianeira, as his new wife; and by sacking Oichalia and seizing Iole, he would bring disaster to himself as well as to Eurytos (see pp. 267–8).

Shortly after Heracles' unhappy visit to Oichalia, some mares were stolen from the herds of Eurytos (or of his son Iphitos). Our sources disagree on the identity of the thief. Heracles may have stolen them as a first act of revenge, or else this was simply another theft by that prince of thieves Autolykos; and in the latter case, Heracles may have acquired the mares at second hand by buying them from Autolykos.¹⁴¹ Suspicion fell on Heracles in any case, and Iphitos went to Tiryns to investigate. This led to the most discreditable episode in the hero's career, in which he murdered Iphitos after receiving him into his home as a guest. According to Diodorus, he took him to a lofty tower of the citadel and asked whether he could see the mares grazing below; and when Iphitos replied that he could not (for they had been hidden away beforehand), Heracles hurled him down to his death, saying that he had been falsely accused.¹⁴² Although it was commonly accepted that this was a deliberate murder, an exculpatory version was also developed in which the hero was said to have killed Iphitos during a temporary fit of madness, as when he had killed his children.¹⁴³

Heracles was struck by a terrible disease as a result of his crime and set off to seek purification. After meeting with a refusal from Neleus, king of Pylos, who was unwilling to purify him because of his friendship with Eurytos, he travelled on to Amyclai in Laconia, where the rites were performed by a certain Deiphobos, son of Hippolytos, who is otherwise unknown.¹⁴⁴ When the disease persisted nonetheless, Heracles visited Delphi to consult the oracle, where he was told that the only way in which he could be delivered from the affliction was to be sold into slavery, and pay the purchase price to Eurytos or the sons of Iphitos. So he was sold to OMPHALE, queen of Lydia, and had to serve her in her homeland in Asia Minor for a year or three years. According to the earliest surviving account by Pherecydes, he was put up for sale by Hermes and was sold for three talents (perhaps a hundred times more than the price of a slave in Classical Athens); and the money was presumably offered to Eurytos, as in the similar account by Apollodorus.¹⁴⁵ Eurytos refused to accept the money, however, because he regarded it as tainted. Or, in Diodorus' version, Heracles crossed over to Asia and asked one of his friends to put him up for sale, and found himself cured of his illness when the proceeds were paid over to the sons of Iphitos.¹⁴⁶

In connection with Heracles' visit to Delphi a remarkable story was told, which was apparently very popular in the early tradition but then fell into the shade. As often in such cases, we can rely on Apollodorus for a good summary. When the priestess at Delphi initially refused to grant a response to Heracles (because he was still polluted by the murder of Iphitos), he was so enraged that he wanted to plunder

the temple and carry off the tripod (on which the priestess sat while delivering her prophecies, see p. 138) with the intention of founding an oracle of his own; but Apollo came to seize it back; and the two fought together until Zeus separated them by hurling a thunderbolt between them. So Apollo recovered the tripod and Heracles was now granted a response. According to the tradition at Delphi in Pausanias' time, Heracles picked up the tripod to remove it from the temple when the priestess, Xenocleia, refused to reply, but gave it back again when she speedily relented. Pausanias, who evidently regarded this as the original story, remarks that the poets had taken it up to sing about Heracles' fight with Apollo for the tripod. But no such work has survived, and we have to wait until the Roman period for the first unequivocal reference to the story in the surviving literature. There can be no doubt, however, about the fame of the story in the early tradition, because the confrontation over the tripod was very popular subject in vase-paintings from the mid-sixth to fifth centuries BC, and it can be traced back as far as the eighth century in the visual arts. The confrontation was sometimes placed at an earlier period, at the time when Heracles came to consult the oracle after killing the children whom Megara had borne to him.¹⁴⁷

To return to our main narrative, Heracles' purchaser, Omphale, daughter of Iardanos (or Iardanes), was a widow who had assumed power in Lydia on the west coast of Asia Minor after the death of her husband Tmolos. Authors and artists of the Hellenistic and Roman periods liked to divert themselves by imagining how she behaved towards this improbable slave of hers, picturing a reversal of roles in which he dressed in her delicate robes and assisted the women of the court in their spinning, while she dressed in his lionskin and took possession of his club.¹⁴⁸ It could be imagined, moreover, that he consented to this because he had fallen in love with her, and he was sometimes said to have fathered a child or some children by her, either during the period of his servitude or after she had granted him an early release.

At a more serious level, Heracles was said to have performed a number of heroic deeds to the benefit of the people of the area. In the first place, he killed two picturesque local villains, rather like those whom Theseus was supposed to have killed while travelling from his birthplace to Athens (see p. 292). LITYERSES was an illegitimate son of Midas who used to challenge passing travellers to a harvesting contest, or simply forced them to help him in the fields, and then cut off their heads with his scythe at the end of the day, binding their bodies into the corn stooks. When he was foolish enough to try this with Heracles, the hero beheaded him with the scythe that he had been given for the work and threw his body into the river Maeander.¹⁴⁹ His name seems to have been derived from an ancient Phrygian reaping song known as the Lityerses-song. The other villain of this kind was SYLEUS, who forced passers-by to dig in his vineyard and then killed them with his hoe. Heracles killed him and his daughter Xenodice with his own hoe, and burned his vines to their roots.¹⁵⁰ Or, in another account, he married the daughter of Syleus, here unnamed, after killing her father, but later stayed away from her for so long that she died of a broken heart.¹⁵¹

In a comical version of the story of Syleus from a Satyr-play by Euripides,

Heracles was sold to Syleus (who presumably took the place of Omphale for the purposes of the play), but soon gave Syleus reason to regret his temerity in purchasing him. For Heracles dug up his vines, slaughtered his strongest ox for food, and ransacked his cellars to satisfy his enormous appetites; the moral being that if one takes on someone like Heracles as a slave, it is not altogether clear who is really the slave and who the master.¹⁵² The story of Heracles' encounter with the CERCOPES, a pair of small ape-like men from the area, was also none too serious in tone. They were notorious thieves, but when they tried to steal the hero's weapons while he was asleep, he woke up and caught them in the act, and then hung them upside down from either end of a pole to carry them off (just as game would be carried off after a hunt). Now their mother had warned them to beware of 'the black-bottomed man', and when they observed from their inverted position that the buttocks of Heracles were dark and hairy where they were not covered by his lionskin, they recognized that the warning had been fulfilled and laughed and joked about the matter, causing such amusement to Heracles that he decided to set them free. They came to a bad end nonetheless, for they were ultimately turned to stone for attempting to cheat Zeus himself.¹⁵³ In lesser-known tales, Heracles also crushed the Itones, some predatory neighbours of Omphale, destroying their city, and he killed a huge snake by the Sagaris, a river of that area.¹⁵⁴

Heracles launches a series of campaigns, starting with an attack on Troy

After expiating for the murder of Iphitos, Heracles returned to Tiryns to assemble an army for an expedition against Laomedon, king of Troy, who had offended him during the period of his labours. This campaign marks the beginning of the period of his greatest deeds (*praxeis*, as opposed to his *athloi* or labours, see p. 242); for after bringing his Trojan campaign to a successful conclusion, he also became involved in a conflict with the Coans during his return, and went on to conduct three major campaigns within the Peloponnese itself. Since his war against Troy and subsequent campaign against Augeias in the Peloponnese were launched to avenge grievances that had been incurred during his labours, and since his three Peloponnesian campaigns fall into a natural group, these 'deeds' of Heracles could be plausibly assigned to a common period while he was still living in the Peloponnese after his labours. This could be regarded as the third period of his life, after his early life at Thebes and the period of his labours, while the fourth and final period of his life could be said to have begun when he left the Peloponnese to marry the Aetolian princess Deianeira. According to the usual biographical pattern, as can be found in Diodorus and Apollodorus, he lived in central Greece from that time onwards, first at Deianeira's home city of Calydon and later at Trachis; and the adventures that were recorded for him in central and northern Greece (apart from the early episodes while he was based at Thebes) came to be assigned to this last period of his life.

During the third and penultimate period of his life with which we are presently concerned, Heracles either continued to live at Tiryns as he had during his labours, or else was forced out by Eurystheus after a time and moved to Pheneos in northern Arcadia, the home city of his grandmother Laonome. According to the latter

tradition, Eurystheus ordered him to leave after he first tried to take revenge against Augeias (see p. 262), alleging that he was plotting to seize power in Argos. Heracles benefitted the people of Pheneos by digging potholes (which can still be seen) to drain the excess water from the plain outside the city.¹⁵⁵

We will now trace the history of Heracles' major campaigns in the order in which they were said to have been conducted. While travelling to the land of the Amazons to fetch the belt of Hippolyte as his ninth labour (see p. 250), he had sailed past Troy and had been struck by the plight of a maiden who had been tied to a rock by the shore. This was HESIONE, the daughter of the king, who had been exposed there at the order of an oracle, to serve as prey to a sea-monster that had been sent against the land by Poseidon (see further on p. 443). Feeling pity for the princess and seeing an opportunity for gain, Heracles had approached her father LAOMEDON and had offered to kill the monster in return for a specific reward, the divine horses that had been presented to Tros as compensation for the abduction of Ganymedes (see p. 442); but after he had fulfilled the task, Laomedon had refused to hand over the promised reward (or had tried to substitute ordinary horses for the divine ones). The hero had been obliged to continue on his way, but he had vowed to return at a future date to exact vengeance.¹⁵⁶

Heracles was often said to have killed the sea-monster from inside. According to Hellanicus, Athena built a defensive wall for him, apparently with a narrow entrance through which the monster could insert its head alone, and he took advantage of this to climb into its mouth and down into its belly, where he killed it by hacking away at its flanks with his sword.¹⁵⁷ Or else he disguised himself as Hesione, draping himself in her clothes, and the monster was happy to swallow him down in the belief that it was devouring its intended victim; this latter version of the story is vividly portrayed in an Etruscan vase-painting from the fourth century BC, and the Hellenistic poet Lycophron alludes to it in his usual obscure fashion, adding that Heracles spent three days in the monster, hacking away at its liver, and went bald when his hair fell out because it was so hot inside.¹⁵⁸

According to an alternative tradition from the Hellenistic period, Heracles confronted the monster while he was sailing to Colchis with the Argonauts.¹⁵⁹ Heracles took no part in any of the great Panhellenic adventures in the earlier tradition, and even when he was introduced into the story of the Argonauts in this way, he was usually said to have been left behind at an early stage in the voyage (see p. 401), for no specific tales were recorded for him in this connection and he might have had the effect of casting the colourless Jason into the shade. Some authors who were more interested in spinning a good yarn than observing the tradition acknowledged this latter point by making Heracles the leader of the expedition. If he did join the Argonauts, he sailed with them during the period of his labours or shortly after completing them.

Heracles was now in a position to assemble an army to support him in this first Trojan War, which is already mentioned in the *Iliad*. It suits Homer's purpose to point to the relatively small size of this expedition, in which Heracles sacked Troy after arriving there 'with only six ships and a scantier force'; but later sources state that he assembled a sizeable army, recruiting the aid of formidable heroes such as

Telamon, the father of Ajax (see p. 433), and Oicles, the father of Amphiaraios, and led them across the Aegean in eighteen ships.¹⁶⁰ After arriving at the Troad, he left Oicles behind to guard the ships while he advanced against the city with the main force. Having been caught by surprise and finding himself outnumbered as a consequence, Laomedon advanced against the ships of the enemy in the hope that he could bring the war to an end by setting fire to them. Oicles came out to confront him, but although he was killed in the ensuing fight, the men who were with him managed to escape back to the ships and removed them to safety by putting out from the shore. When Laomedon then withdrew and engaged with Heracles and his main force near the city, he was killed along with most of his followers.¹⁶¹ Or else Laomedon was killed afterwards during the storming of the city. Telamon was the first to break through the city walls, entering Troy ahead of Heracles, who was so angry at being outdone that he threatened Telamon with his sword. Thinking swiftly, Telamon piled some stones together and pacified the hero by telling him that he was building an altar to Heracles the Noble Victor (Callinicos, a cultic title of Heracles).¹⁶² All the sons of Laomedon apart from Priam were killed in the fighting. After his victory, Heracles made amends to Telamon by offering the king's daughter Hesione to him as a prize of war; and he allowed Hesione to pick out a single person to be freed from among the captives. When she picked her only surviving brother, he said that she must offer something in ransom for him, and she paid for him with her veil. For this reason, so it was said, Laomedon's son and successor, who had originally been called Podarces, came to be known as Priam (as though his name were derived from *priamai*, to buy).¹⁶³ Since Telamon was already married, he took Hesione as a concubine rather than as his wife, and she bore him a son Teucros, who would later fight at Troy alongside Telamon's legitimate son Ajax.¹⁶⁴

Seeing an opportunity to cause harm to Heracles, Hera sent storm-winds against his ships as he was sailing home from Troy, causing him to be driven to the island of Cos in the south-eastern Aegean. This was a familiar feature of his legend from a very early period, as is clear from passing allusions in the *Iliad*. According to the earliest surviving account of the subsequent events, by Pherecydes, Heracles forced his way ashore when the local ruler, Eurypylos, son of Poseidon, tried to prevent him from landing, and killed him and his sons, and then fathered a son Thessalos, by Eurypylos' daughter Chalcioppe.¹⁶⁵ The Coans who fought at Troy are mentioned in the *Iliad* as having been sons of this Thessalos.¹⁶⁶ Apollodorus offers some further details, probably also from Pherecydes, saying that the Coans tried to repel the strangers by pelting their ships with stones, taking them to be pirates, but Heracles landed and forced his way into the city at night, although he suffered a wound in the fighting.¹⁶⁷ It was after this episode that Athena fetched Heracles to help the gods in their battle against the Giants (see further on p. 82).

In another account, Heracles lost five of his six ships in the storm and was wrecked on Cos in the last of them. After coming ashore, he met Antagoras, a son of the king who was tending the royal flocks, and asked him for a sheep to still his hunger; but Antagoras challenged him to a fight, and a general battle ensued when the Coans came to the help of Antagoras and Heracles too received support from his followers. On finding that the tide of battle was turning against him, Heracles sought

refuge in a cottage that was inhabited by an old Thracian woman, who disguised him by dressing him in women's clothing. He subsequently returned to battle, defeated the Coans, and slept with the king's daughter as above, fathering Thessalos. This was a local version of the legend that was devised to explain why the priest of Heracles at Antimacheia on Cos used to wear women's clothing when offering sacrifice to him.¹⁶⁸

Three Peloponnesian campaigns, against Augeias at Elis, Neleus at Pylos, and Hippocoon at Sparta

After arriving back at Tiryns, Heracles made preparations for his first campaign in the Peloponnese, which was directed against AUGEIAS, king of Elis, in the north-west of the peninsula. Augeias had angered him in much the same way as Laomedon, by refusing to pay him the promised reward for a valuable service that he had performed, in this case the clearing of the Augeian stables (see p. 248). On hearing of Heracles' intentions, Augeias assembled an army of his own, placing it under the command of Eurytos and Cteatos, the MOLIONIDES (or Moliones), who would prove to be a match even for Heracles himself because they were two men joined into one. In the usual account, they were joined together at the waist (or shared a single torso) but had separate limbs and heads, so forming a single being with four legs, four arms and two heads.¹⁶⁹ Poseidon had fathered them by a certain Molione who was married to Augeias' brother Actor.¹⁷⁰ Homer refers to them in the *Iliad* (calling them the Moliones on one occasion and the Actoriones on another) without explicitly stating that they were conjoined twins.¹⁷¹ A fragment from Ibycus, a lyric poet of the sixth century BC, states that they were born as a united being from a silver egg.¹⁷²

In the earliest surviving account, by Pindar, of the conflict between Heracles and the Molionides, it is briefly recounted that the hero lay in wait for them in a thicket near Cleonai and killed them by the roadside, after they had previously destroyed his army while it was encamped near Elis.¹⁷³ Apollodorus provides a fuller narrative, saying that Heracles fell ill when he made this first attack and thus arranged a truce with the Molionides, but they attacked the army nonetheless on learning that he was ill, and slaughtered many of his men. So he withdrew for the time being, and when he later heard that they were going to attend the Isthmian Games (which were held near Corinth), he ambushed them at Cleonai, in the north-west corner of the Argolid between Argos and Corinth.¹⁷⁴ This was evidently the standard account, although the exculpatory detail of the hero's illness may have been added later than the rest. Pausanias, who remarks that the killing of the Molionides was nothing to boast about, reports that Iphicles, the half-brother of Heracles, was killed when the army was attacked during the expedition against Elis, and that the murder of the Molionides provided a mythical explanation for the (historical) Eleian boycott of the Isthmian Games. For it was said that since Elis had failed to receive the compensation that it had demanded for the murder, Eleian athletes had stayed away from these games ever since.¹⁷⁵

With the Molionides out of the way, Heracles seized the city of Elis with little

difficulty, killing Augeias and all his sons apart from Phyleus, who had been living in Doulichion ever since he had been banished by his father for arguing that Heracles should be paid his promised fee for clearing the Augeian stables (see p. 248). In gratitude for that previous support, he summoned Phyleus back to rule the kingdom; and he also founded the Olympian festival and games, which were held in the province of Elis every four years.¹⁷⁶

Heracles directed his next campaign against NELEUS, the king of Pylos in Messenia (see p. 258), for having refused to purify him after the murder of Iphitos (see p. 258), or for having tried to rob him of the cattle of Geryon.¹⁷⁷ Nestor, a son of Neleus, refers to the episode in the *Iliad*, remarking that his father was killed along with his eleven brothers.¹⁷⁸ The most formidable of the sons of Neleus was the eldest, PERICLYMENOS, because his grandfather Poseidon had granted him the power to change his shape at will.¹⁷⁹ This brought him no advantage, however, on the present occasion, because he was betrayed in the course of the fighting by Athena, who pointed out to Heracles that he had settled on the yoke of his chariot in the form of a bee, enabling the hero to shoot him dead with a well-aimed arrow. Such is the early account offered in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*; Apollodorus adds that Periclymenos had taken the form of a lion and snake beforehand.¹⁸⁰ In other versions, he was clubbed to death as a fly or shot as an eagle; or conversely, he escaped death by flying off as an eagle.¹⁸¹ After engaging in a fierce battle with the remaining troops (and perhaps even with some gods, see below), Heracles finally prevailed and conquered the city, killing Neleus and all his sons apart from Nestor, who was below military age and absent at the time because he was being brought up at Gerenia, a neighbouring town. As at Troy, Heracles allowed Nestor to take over the throne as the only surviving heir; and he continued to rule at Pylos until well after the Trojan War (see p. 451).¹⁸²

Various reports suggest that Heracles confronted one or another of the gods in the course of the fighting. Although it is stated in the *Iliad* that he shot Hades *en Pylō* among the dead, it is by no means certain that Homer had sandy Pylos in mind, since he may have been referring to the gates (*pylos* or *pylē*, usually in the plural as *pylai*) of the Underworld, as a scholion suggests, in which case the incident could have occurred while Heracles was fetching Cerberos. Some later authors certainly assume, however, that Hades was wounded at Pylos, where he might well have come to assemble the many who were killed, if not actually to fight in support of the Pylians. Pindar remarks in one of his odes that Heracles confronted Poseidon with his club while the god was helping to defend Pylos (as is understandable since Neleus was a son of his), and then goes on to say that the hero also confronted the archer Apollo, and Hades as he was assembling the dead with his wand.¹⁸³ It is not entirely clear whether we are to understand that these latter confrontations also took place at Pylos. The scholia assert at any rate that these were separate incidents, relating to Heracles' theft of the Delphian tripod and seizing of Cerberos respectively. It is stated, furthermore, in the Hesiodic *Shield* that Ares was wounded by him at Pylos, as was Hera too according to the epic poet Panyasis.¹⁸⁴

After his campaign against Neleus, Heracles attacked HIPPOCOON, king of Sparta (see p. 447), and his twelve or twenty sons to punish them for having fought as allies

of Neleus (or for having refused to purify him after the murder of Iphitos).¹⁸⁵ He was also angered by the death of his cousin OIONOS, son of Licymnios, who had been killed at Sparta in the following circumstances. While he had been looking at Hippocoon's palace during a visit to Sparta, a fierce watchdog had rushed out to attack Oionos, and he had knocked it down with a well-aimed stone; whereupon the sons of Hippocoon had come rushing out in their turn and had beaten him to death with their cudgels.¹⁸⁶ Oionos was otherwise remembered as the victor in the foot-race at the first Olympian Games.¹⁸⁷

Since Hippocoon could call on the support of his many sons, Heracles visited Cepheus, son of Aleos, the king of Tegea, while he was passing through Arcadia, and asked him and his twenty sons to join him as his allies. Although Cepheus was initially reluctant to take part, fearing an attack from neighbouring Argos if he left his city undefended, the hero gave Cepheus' daughter, Sterope, a lock of the Gorgon's hair in a bronze jar that he had acquired from Athena, saying that she should hold it up from the rampart three times if there were any attack, taking care not to look at it herself, and the enemy would then turn away and flee. It would seem that a mere lock of the Gorgon's hair would cast terror into all who saw it, even if it would not suffice to turn them to stone as would the full head of the Gorgon. On hearing this, Cepheus agreed to join the expedition.¹⁸⁸ With the support of these and other allies, Heracles killed Hippocoon and his sons in battle near Sparta and captured the city, but at a heavy cost, because Cepheus was killed too along with all of his sons (or all but three of them), as was Heracles' half-brother Iphicles (in one tradition at least, for it was also said that he was killed by the Molionides).¹⁸⁹ In another account of the story, we are told that Heracles was so enraged to hear of the fate of Oionos, who was a mere boy at the time, that he launched an immediate attack against Hippocoon and his sons as soon as he heard about the matter, without due preparation; but he was wounded in the thigh on this occasion and was obliged to withdraw to Therapne (on the Eurotas to the south-west of Sparta), where his wound was cured by Asclepios. This tale accounted for the origin of the local cult of Asclepios Cotyleus, which was said to have been founded by Heracles; it was explained that Heracles gave him this title of Cotyleus because his hip joint (*kotylē*) had been healed by him there. After recovering from his wound, Heracles raised an army and launched a successful attack as above.¹⁹⁰ Since Tyndareos, the rightful king of Sparta, had been expelled by Hippocoon and his sons (see p. 447), Heracles now summoned him back to take over the throne.¹⁹¹

The later life of Heracles in Central and Northern Greece

Heracles marries Deianeira and lives with her at Calydon until he accidentally kills a page-boy

After his campaign against Hippocoon, which would be the last of his wars in the Peloponnese, Heracles decided to leave the peninsula altogether to settle in Aetolia

in the south-west corner of the mainland; for he wanted to marry DEIANEIRA, a daughter of Oineus, king of Calydon, and to found a new family in her homeland. As further explanation for his departure from the Peloponnese, some authors add that he also wanted to make a new start because he was so distressed by the deaths of his cousin Oionos and half-brother Iphicles.¹⁹²

It was no easy matter for Heracles to win Deianeira as his bride since she was also being courted by Acheloos, the god of the great river of that name that flowed along the western borders of Aetolia. In Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* she herself describes how he had visited her father's palace to seek her hand, causing her great alarm because he was a fearsome being who manifested himself now as a bull, now as a serpent, and now as a man with the head of a bull. Heracles approached Acheloos by his own waters to wrestle with him for Deianeira, who watched anxiously from the bank. Although the river-god turned himself into a serpent and then into a bull and perhaps into other forms too, Heracles kept a firm grip on him and finally compelled him to submit by forcing him down to the ground and breaking off one of his horns.¹⁹³

Acheloos recovered his horn from Heracles by offering to exchange it for the horn of Amaltheia, a magical horn that had the power to provide as much food and drink as anyone could desire.¹⁹⁴ This horn had originally been a gift from Zeus to the nymph (or nymphs) who had reared him as an infant. For in one account at least (see further on p. 69), Zeus had been reared by a nymph called Amaltheia, who had fed him on the milk of a she-goat; and when he grew up, he broke a horn from the goat to turn it into a horn of plenty as a gift for his nurse. Or else Amaltheia was the name of the goat itself.¹⁹⁵ Apollodorus states the Amaltheia's horn of plenty was a bull's horn (evidently a misapprehension that arose because it was exchanged for the taurine horn of Acheloos). In the Roman world, the magical horn was known as the *cornu copias* (i.e. horn of plenty), or in later Latin *cornucopia*; and it could be regarded as an attribute of Copia, the personification of Plenty (and also of Ceres, the harvest-goddess, as a goddess of plenty). Ovid combines Greek and Roman motifs by suggesting that naiad-nymphs filled the broken horn of Acheloos with fruits and flowers, and that Copia came to possess it as her horn of plenty. Hyginus records a similar story in which Heracles is said to have given the broken horn to the Hesperides, who created the horn of plenty by filling it with fruit.¹⁹⁶ Ovid says much the same about the horn of Amaltheia elsewhere, saying that her goat broke a horn off on a tree, and that she filled it with fruit and took it to the infant Zeus.¹⁹⁷

After winning Deianeira as his wife in this way, Heracles lived with her for a number of years at the court of the ever-hospitable Oineus in Calydon, and she bore him several children, including Hyllos, who would lead the Heraclids when they first tried to invade the Peloponnese (see p. 272), and most unusually a daughter, Macaria,¹⁹⁸ whom we will also encounter again in connection with the Heraclids (see p. 277). The hero was able to repay his Calydonian hosts during this time by assisting them in a war against the Thesprotians, who lived to the north of them in southern Epirus; after capturing their main city, Ephyra, he took Astyoche, the daughter of its ruler Phylas, away with him as a prize of war, and fathered a notable son by her, Tleplemos (see p. 282).¹⁹⁹

As the result of an unfortunate accident, Heracles was finally obliged to seek a new home once again. For as he was feasting in the palace one day, a page-boy angered him while pouring out water to clean his hands, by using water from a foot-bath or by sheer clumsiness, and he struck out at him with unintended force, causing his death (much as he had done with Linos long before, see p. 238). The unfortunate page, who was given a variety of appropriate names such as Eunomos (Good Behaviour) or Cyathos (Wine-ladle), was of noble birth or even a relation of the king; and although his father was willing to forgive Heracles because he recognized that the killing had been an accident, the hero insisted on departing into exile to be purified and make a new start.²⁰⁰ He decided to travel to southern Thessaly to seek refuge with his old friend Ceux, who was king of Trachis (later Heracleia) at the head of the Malian Gulf. He was accompanied on the journey by his wife and young son Hyllos, and perhaps other children too.

Heracles confronts the Centaur Nessos and the Dryopians while travelling to his final home

The journey was not without its risks and adventures. To begin with, Heracles and his wife had an disagreeable encounter with a Centaur on reaching the river Euenos not far to the east of Calydon. This Centaur, NESSOS, used to carry people across the river in return for a fee and offered to do so on the present occasion, claiming that the gods had appointed him to the post of ferryman because he was of such excellent character. Although Heracles was quite capable of crossing over unaided, he willingly paid Nessos to carry Deianeira across. But the Centaur was in fact of no better character than most of his kind, and he attempted to rape Deianeira in mid-stream or on arriving at the opposite bank. She alerted her husband through her loud screams, however, and he brought Nessos down with one of his poisoned arrows. As the life ebbed from his body, Nessos told Deianeira that if she wanted to acquire a powerful love-potion to use on her husband, she should collect some of the semen that he had shed on to the ground and mix it with some blood from his wound. She took him at his word and did so, little realizing that the mixture would be a virulent poison because the blood was tainted with the poison (i.e. hydra's venom, see p. 245) from Heracles' arrow.²⁰¹ Deianeira later had occasion to make use of this unsavoury potion, and thus inadvertently caused the destruction of her husband just as Nessos would have hoped (see p. 268).

Later in the journey, Heracles and his family passed through the land of the Dryopians (Dryopes), who lived in the area between Mt Parnassos and southern Thessaly. On running across a Dryopian called THEIODAMAS who was driving a pair of bullocks, Heracles asked him for a little food for his young son Hyllos; and when this was refused to him, he secured an ample supply of food by seizing and slaughtering one of the bullocks. Theiodamas rushed back to his city to rouse his fellow-Dryopians against the aggressor, and Heracles was hard-pressed in the fight that developed, falling into such danger that he had to arm his wife, who suffered a wound in the breast.²⁰² Or else he met with no trouble from the Dryopians after seizing the bullock, but subsequently mounted a campaign against them of his own

accord after settling in Trachis.²⁰³

There was a tradition that stated that Heracles expelled the Dryopians from their original homeland to punish them for having committed a grave act of sacrilege, by plundering the temple of Apollo at Delphi under the leadership of their ruler Phylas. With the help of an army of Malians (i.e. men from the region of Trachis), the hero defeated them in battle, killing their king, and drove them out of the land.²⁰⁴ Since the Dryopians were regarded as having been the original inhabitants of the little province of Doris, in Central Greece between Aetolia and Phocis, and the Dorians too were supposed to have lived there for a time at least before entering the Peloponnese, this present story of the expulsion of the Dryopians resolved a problem in mythical history. For if they had been driven out by Heracles at this time, it could be explained that the Dorians had then taken their place, moving there from their previous home further north in Thessaly, and had lived there until they invaded the Peloponnese under the leadership of the Heraclids (see p. 276). This pattern of events is first attested by Herodotus, who states that the Dorians had moved from Thessaly to Doris, which had previously been known as Dryopis, and later from there to the Peloponnese.²⁰⁵

After the perils of the journey, Heracles brought his family safely to Trachis, which would be his home for the rest of his life.²⁰⁶ Little is recorded of his host CEUX beyond the fact that was a good friend of Heracles (even if he was not powerful enough to protect his family after his death, see p. 277). This Ceux, who is of unknown descent, should be distinguished from the Ceux who was turned into a bird (see p. 380). He figured prominently in a lost Hesiodic poem, the *Marriage of Ceux*, in which Heracles also appeared. Two children are recorded for him, a son Hippasos who was killed during Heracles' final campaign (see p. 268), and a daughter Themistonee who became the wife of Cynos, a violent opponent of Heracles whom we will encounter shortly.²⁰⁷

Final campaigns and confrontations

While Heracles was living at Trachis, AIGIMIOS, son of Doros, the king of the Dorians, asked him to assist the Dorians in a border-war against some enemies of theirs, the Lapiths, a warlike people of northern Thessaly. As this would indicate, the Dorians were living in northern Greece at this time prior to their arrival in Doris. Accompanied by some Arcadian followers, Heracles fought in support of Aigimios, helping him to defeat the Lapiths and killing their leader, Coronos, son of Caineus, with his own hand. Although he had been promised a share of Aigimios' kingdom as a reward, he refused to take it, asking instead that it should be kept in trust for his descendants. A lasting bond was thus established between the Dorians and the hero's sons and descendants, the Heraclids, who would ultimately lead the Dorians to their final home in the Peloponnese (see pp. 276ff.).

During his return journey, Heracles became involved in two individual confrontations. His first opponent, CYCNOS, was a brutal son of Ares who used to challenge passing strangers to single combat, and, in some accounts at least, would cut off their heads to use their skulls to construct a temple of Ares (or Apollo).²⁰⁸ In

the earliest surviving account in the Hesiodic *Shield*, Cycnos confronted Heracles and his charioteer Iolaos at the grove of Apollo at Pagasai (the port of Iolcos on the northern tip of the Gulf of Pagasai) with the intention of robbing them of their splendid armour;²⁰⁹ but Heracles, whose ardour was fired up by Apollo, felled him in the resulting duel with a spear-throw to the neck.²¹⁰ When Ares then tried to avenge the death of his son, Athena turned his spear aside as it was flying through the air, and Heracles forced him to the ground in the single combat that followed, with a spear-thrust to the thigh.²¹¹ Ceux saw to the burial of Cycnos (here described as his son-in-law), but Apollo caused his grave and memorial to be washed away by the river Anauros because he had plundered the god's offerings during his lifetime.²¹² Some later accounts locate the episode at Itonos in south-eastern Thessaly;²¹³ and Zeus is sometimes said to have put a stop to the fight between Ares and Heracles by hurling a thunderbolt between them.²¹⁴ In a version ascribed to Stesichorus, Heracles fled from the initial confrontation because Cycnos was aided by his father, but later caught Cycnos on his own and killed him.²¹⁵

The second of these stories, which tells of Heracles' confrontation with the king of Ormenion (near Mt Pelion), is of lesser interest and probably of later origin. According to Diodorus, who names the king as Ormenios and is the first author to report the story, Heracles asked to marry his daughter, Astydameia, but was turned down on the wholly reasonable ground that he already had a legitimate wife in Deianeira; so the hero took matters into his own hands by killing the king, capturing his city and seizing his daughter. Or, in Apollodorus' version, in which the king is named Amyntor, he was killed by Heracles because he was rash enough to try to prevent the hero from passing through his territory.²¹⁶

Heracles now decided that the time had come for him to exact his long-delayed revenge on Eurytos, who had refused to surrender his daughter Iole to him after he had won her in an archery-contest (see p. 258). There was no settled tradition on the location of Eurytos' city of Oichalia, for it was variously identified with places in Arcadia, Messenia, northern Thessaly and Euboea. Since it apparently lay no great distance by sea from Trachis, and Heracles stopped off at the north-western cape of Euboea during his return voyage, the Euboean site seems most plausible in connection with the present sequence of events. In that case, the city would have been situated near Eretria in the east-central region of the island, opposite southern Boeotia. The early epic poet Creophylus placed Eurytos' city in Euboea in his lost poem *The Sack of Oichalia*, as does Sophocles in *Trachinian Women*.²¹⁷ Heracles assembled a large force for the enterprise, consisting of his own Arcadian followers and men from the surrounding area (i.e. Malians from the region of Trachis and Eastern Locrians). On arriving in Euboea, he soon captured Oichalia, killing Eurytos and all his surviving sons. The most notable losses on Heracles' own side were Argeios and Melas, two sons of his uncle Licymnios, and Hippasos, a son of Ceux. After seeing to their burial and plundering the city, he set off for Trachis, taking Iole, the daughter of the dead king, with him on his ship.²¹⁸ It was sometimes said that Iole was extremely reluctant to yield to Heracles or to agree to become his wife, as would be understandable in the circumstances, and continued to defy him even when he proceeded to kill all of her surviving relations in front of her.²¹⁹ In one

account she then tried to kill herself by throwing herself down from the wall of Oichalia, but failed in her attempt because her clothing billowed out to slow her descent.²²⁰

The death and apotheosis of Heracles

In the course of his return voyage, Heracles called at Cape Cenaion (now Cape Lichada) at the south-western tip of Euboea to offer a sacrifice to his father Zeus. He was unable to proceed with it at once, however, because he lacked the proper clothing, and he sent his herald LICHAS ahead to Trachis to fetch some ceremonial robes. While fulfilling his task, Lichas happened to mention to Deianeira that her husband was bringing Iole home with him as a captive; or he even told her that Heracles was in love with the princess. Alarmed by this unwelcome news, Deianeira called to mind the supposed love-potion that she had acquired by collecting the blood and semen of the dying Centaur Nessos (see p. 266). As we saw above, Nessos had told her that this mixture would ensure the fidelity of her husband, but it was in fact a virulent poison because the Centaur's blood had been contaminated with hydra's venom from Heracles' arrow. Taking Nessos at his word, however, Deianeira rubbed some of it into her husband's robes before passing them on to Lichas. When Heracles put on the robes and approached the fire to make his intended sacrifice, the poison was activated by the heat of the flames and began to burn into his skin, causing him unendurable pain.²²¹

Such is the way in which these events were consistently recounted by the mythographers. The first indication of the story appears in the remains of the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, which mention that Deianeira did a terrible thing by smearing poison on the robe that Lichas took to Heracles. The poet Bacchylides (died mid-fifth century BC) recounts in one of his odes that Heracles stopped off at Cenaion to sacrifice some of the spoils after burning Oichalia, namely nine bulls to Zeus, two to Poseidon, and an unyoked heifer to Athena; and that Deianeira, on learning that Heracles was planning to send Iole to his house as his bride, unwittingly brought destruction on herself (a reference to her subsequent suicide) by making use of the gifts that she had received from Nessos.²²² The story that is implied in these sources is first told in full in Sophocles' *Trachinian Women*, in much the same way as summarized above, except that Lichas brings Iole to Trachis, along with other female captives from Oichalia, when sent on ahead by Heracles, and Deianeira dispatches the robe to him on her own initiative rather than in response to his request.²²³

On feeling the terrible effects of the potion in the robe that Lichas had brought to him, Heracles supposed that Lichas himself was to blame, and lifted him up by his feet and hurled him over the cliffs into the sea below.²²⁴ As Lichas was falling through the air, he became petrified with fear, and turned into a rock that could be seen off the coast ever afterwards, which sailors took care not to step on, as if it would be pained by their tread;²²⁵ this detail of the story may have been inspired by the presence of some small islands off the coast called the Lichades.²²⁶ Heracles tried to relieve himself of his pain by tearing off the poisoned tunic (or 'shirt of Nessos' as it is sometimes called), but this merely increased his agony, because the fabric had

become stuck to his skin and he thus pulled off strips of his flesh along with it. As the poison burned down to his bones, he was carried into the ship and conveyed back to Trachis; and when Deianeira saw the effect of her action, she hanged herself (or stabbed herself) in remorse.²²⁷

Now believing that death was the only remedy available to him, Heracles instructed his eldest son, Hyllos, to marry Iole when he came of age, and made his way (or had himself carried) west from Trachis to the summit of Mt Oeta, where he constructed a pyre and climbed on to it.²²⁸ Or else the pyre was constructed by Hyllos, either single-handedly or with the help of his brothers.²²⁹ Or, in another version, Licymnios and Iolaos, the uncle and half-brother of Heracles, travelled to Delphi at his order to enquire about a cure, but were told instead that they should build a pyre on the mountain, and should arrange for him to be taken there with his arms and armour, and leave the rest to Zeus.²³⁰

When Heracles climbed on to the pyre and asked that it should be set alight, no one dared to do so apart from the great archer Philoctetes (who might reasonably have been imagined to be present because he lived in Malis below the mountain). In return for the favour, the hero gave him his bow and arrows, which he used to good effect in the closing stage of the Trojan War (see p. 480); or else Philoctetes' father Poias happened to pass by while searching for his flocks and lit the fire, receiving the bow in return, which he bequeathed to his son.²³¹

In the earliest tradition, Heracles died and departed to Hades just like any other mortal. Achilles remarks accordingly in the *Iliad* that he is willing to accept death whenever the gods bring it on him, 'for not even the mighty Heracles could escape death, very dear though he was to lord Zeus, son of Cronos, but fate overcame him and the dreadful anger of Hera';²³² and we are told in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus saw him among the shades in the Underworld, still an impressive figure who caused all the other shades to scatter like birds at his approach, as he advanced with an arrow in his bow, glaring fiercely around him as if about to shoot. It is explained to be sure, in the present text of the *Odyssey*, that this was simply a phantom because the true Heracles was up above with the gods, but the three lines in question were clearly added at a later period to reconcile the Homeric account with later belief.²³³ The lines in the *Theogony* that refer to Heracles' presence on Olympos can be regarded likewise as being of later origin, belonging as they do to a section of the poem that was almost certainly added after Hesiod's time.²³⁴ Although it is hard to tell exactly when Heracles was first thought to have become a god, the evidence from the visual arts suggests that the idea of his ascent to heaven had established itself by the beginning of the sixth century BC. In Attic vase-paintings from that and the following century, he can regularly be seen climbing into a chariot, driven by Athena, Hermes, or some other deity, to make his ascent to the home of the gods, or else rising into the air in a chariot as the pyre blazes below, or walking into the presence of the gods at the end of his journey. In literary accounts, he is said to have been raised up to heaven to the accompaniment of thunder by a cloud that passed under him as he sat on his pyre, or to have been carried up to heaven by Zeus in a four-horse chariot.²³⁵ According to a notion that is first attested in the Hellenistic period, all that was mortal in him was burned away by the flames, leaving only the divine part that he

had inherited from his father Zeus.²³⁶ Diodorus reports no definite wonder, merely stating that the pyre was wholly consumed as the result of a lightning-strike, and that it was assumed that Heracles had entered the company of the gods because his bones were nowhere to be found.²³⁷



Figure 11.3. Athena serving wine to Heracles. Attic cup, ca. 480–470 BCE. Photo: Hermann Buresch. Staatliche Antikensammlung, Munich, Germany. © bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, New York.

After Heracles was welcomed into the company of the gods on Olympos, Hera agreed to be reconciled with him at last, and allowed him to marry her daughter Hebe, the goddess of youth, in a union that symbolized his overcoming of age and death.²³⁸ It is reported in one source that Hebe bore two sons to him, Alexiades and Anicetos,²³⁹ but these are insubstantial figures whose names are based on cultic titles of Heracles. Some claimed that Hera formally adopted him as her son through a ceremonial re-enactment of his birth, by lying on a bed, drawing him close to her body, and allowing him to fall through her robes to the ground. Or, in another story of the kind, she adopted him by offering him her breast.²⁴⁰ After his eventful life as a hero, he now enjoyed the timeless existence of a god, leaving little for his biographer to report.

Notes

- 1 Apollod. 2.4.6, Pher. 3F13.
- 2 Apollod. 2.4.6–7, cf. Ant. Lib. 41.8–10 (very similar), Paus. 9.19.1, Ov. *Met.* 7.762–93. The story of the fox goes back to the epic cycle, fr. incerti loci 1 Davies.
- 3 Eratosth. 33, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.35.
- 4 Apollod. 2.4.7.
- 5 Ibid., Tzetz. Lyc. 932. Comaitho fell in love with Cephalos, schol. Lyc. 934, Tzetz. l.c.
- 6 Hes. *Shield* 27–56, D.S. 4.9.1–3, Apollod. 2.4.8, Hyg. *Fab.* 29. Cup and lengthening of night first in Pher. 3F13.
- 7 Hom. *Il.* 19.95–125.
- 8 Ov. *Met.* 9.281–323.
- 9 Ant. Lib. 29.
- 10 Paus. 9.11.2.
- 11 Pi. *Nem.* 1.33–72, Theoc. 24.1–102, Apollod. 2.4.8, D.S. 4.10.1; eight months, Apollod. l.c., ten months, Theoc. 24.1, new-born, Plautus *Amphitryo* 1123ff.
- 12 Pher. 3F69 (from Apollod. 2.4.8).
- 13 Eratosth. 44, Lyc. 1327–8 with scholia; other versions, D.S. 4.9.6, Paus. 9.25.2.
- 14 Apollod. 2.4.9, cf. Theoc. 24.103–29.
- 15 Apollod. 2.4.9, D.S. 3.67.2, Ael. *V.H.* 3.32 (kills Linos with plectrum).
- 16 Paus. 9.29.3.
- 17 Paus. 1.43.7, Conon 19; see also Paus. 2.19.7.
- 18 Apollod. 2.4.10.
- 19 Paus. 9.27.5; seven nights, Herodorus 31F20.
- 20 D.S. 4.29.3.
- 21 Apollod. 2.7.6, D.S. 4.29–30.
- 22 Apollod. 2.4.10.
- 23 Apollod. 2.4.11, Paus. 9.37.2.
- 24 D.S. 4.10.3–5.
- 25 Hom. *Od.* 11.269–70.
- 26 Stes. 58 (see Paus. 9.11.1).
- 27 Pher. 3F14, Apollod. 2.4.12.
- 28 D.S. 4.11.1.
- 29 Nic. Damasc. 90F13.
- 30 Paus. 9.11.1.
- 31 Apollod. 2.4.11.
- 32 Paus. 9.17.2, 9.19.3.
- 33 Proclus, summary of *Cypria*.
- 34 Pi. *Isth.* 4.61–6.
- 35 Apollod. 2.4.11.
- 36 Nic. Damasc. 90F13.
- 37 D.S. 4.10.6–11.2.
- 38 Ael. *V.H.* 2.32; Apollod. 2.4.12 (the Pythia changed his name from Alceides).
- 39 D.S. 4.10.1.
- 40 Hom. *Od.* 11.622, cf. *Il.* 8.363, 19.132–3.
- 41 Apollod. 2.4.12 with 2.5.11.
- 42 D.S. 4.11.3–26.4, Apollod. 2.5.1–12.
- 43 Hes. *Theog.* 326–32.
- 44 Epimenides 3B2 DK, cf. Herodorus 31F4 and 21 (from moon, beings born there are fifteen times bigger than on earth), Euphorion fr. 84 Powell (cited Plut. *Moralia* 677a; lion son of Selene), Hyg. *Fab.* 30 (nourished by Moon in a two-mouthed cave), Steph. Byz. s.v. Apesas.
- 45 Apollod. 2.5.1, D.S. 4.11.3–4; cf. Eratosth. 12 (killed by strangulation, as already described by Pisander = fr. 2A Davies).
- 46 Theoc. 25.204–71.
- 47 Apollod. 2.5.1, Call. fr. 54–9 (see also *Suppl. Hell.* pp. 110ff.), schol. Stat. *Theb.* 4.160.
- 48 Theoc. 25.272–9.
- 49 Pi. *Isth.* 7.47–8 (implied), Bacch. 13.56–64.

- 50 Apollod. 2.4.11, Paus. 2.31.13; Theoc. 25.207–10.
- 51 Apollod. 2.5.1.
- 52 Ibid.; Hom. *Il.* 15.639–40 (that Copreus took messages from Eurystheus to Heracles).
- 53 Hes. *Theog.* 313–8.
- 54 E.g. Alcaeus 443 and Apollod. 2.5.2 (nine), Simon. 569 (fifty), D.S. 4.11.5 (a hundred).
- 55 E.g. Apollod. 2.5.2; earliest references Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 1274, Palaeph. 38.
- 56 Apollod. 2.4.2, D.S. 4.11.5–6, cf. Soph. *Trach.* 573–4, Eur. *Madness of Heracles*, 419–22, Paus. 2.37.4, Ov. *Met.* 9.69–76.
- 57 Hellanic. 4F103, Herodorus 31F23; the proverbial phrase was already known to Archilochus, fr. 259 West.
- 58 Eratosth. 11, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.23.
- 59 Apollod. 2.5.4, D.S. 4.12.1–2; earliest references Hecat. 1F6, Soph. *Trach.* 1097.
- 60 Apollod. 2.5.4, D.S. 4.12.3–8 (Dionysos left the wine-jar); early references in Stes. 181 (Pholos served wine to Heracles in a huge bowl), Soph. *Trach.* 1095–6 (Heracles defeated the Centaurs).
- 61 Apollod. 2.5.3.
- 62 D.S. 4.13.1.
- 63 Pi. *Ol.* 3.28–32.
- 64 Schol. Pi. *Ol.* 3.53.
- 65 Call. *Hymn* 3.98–109.
- 66 Eur. *Madness of Heracles*, 375–9, D.S. 4.13.1.
- 67 Apollod. 2.5.6 (receives castanets from Athena), cf. Pher. 3F72; rationalistic accounts in which Heracles made them himself, Hellanic. 4F104b, D.S. 4.13.2; Pisander fr. 5 Davies (from Paus. 8.22.4, Heracles did not kill the birds).
- 68 A.R. 2.1030ff.; Hyg. *Fab.* 30 (Stymphalian birds shoot out feathers), schol. A.R. 2.382 (the birds took refuge on isle of Ares after chased away by Heracles), Serv. *Aen.* 8.299.
- 69 Paus. 8.22.4–6.
- 70 Best account Apollod. 2.5.5; D.S. 4.13.3 (diverted Alpheios), Apollod. l.c. (Peneios and Alpheios), Paus. 5.1.9–10 (Manios); see also Pi. *Ol.* 10.29–30, Theoc. 25.7–152, schol. *Il.* 2.629 and 11.700 (Phyleus as arbiter, judges against Augeias); Hom. *Il.* 2.628–30 (reference to exile of Phyleus).
- 71 Apollod. 2.5.5 (former version), D.S. 4.33.1 (latter), Bacch. fr. 44SM.
- 72 Ael. *V.H.* 1.24.
- 73 Paus. 5.5.4.
- 74 Acus. 2F29 (from Apollod. 2.5.7).
- 75 Apollod. 2.5.7, D.S. 4.13.4; Paus. 1.27.9 (origin of bull of Marathon).
- 76 E.g. Verg. *Aen.* 8.293–5 and Vat. Myth. 1.47 respectively.
- 77 Hyg. *Fab.* 30.
- 78 Pi. fr. 169a SM, Eur. *Alc.* 482–98, *Madness of Heracles* 380–5.
- 79 D.S. 4.15.3–4.
- 80 Apollod. 2.5.8, Hellanic. 4F105 (Abderos torn apart by horses of Diomedes).
- 81 Apollod. 2.5.8, D.S. 4.15.4.
- 82 Ov. *Met.* 9.196, Hyg. *Fab.* 30.
- 83 Apollod. 2.5.9.
- 84 Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 408–18; cf. Eur. *Ion* 1143–5.
- 85 A.R. 2.966–9.
- 86 Pi. *Nem.* 3.38–9 with schol. 64, fr. 172 SM, Hellanic. 4F106, D.S. 4.16 (full narrative), schol. A.R. 2.778, 780.
- 87 Apollod. 2.5.9.
- 88 Pher. 3F18, Apollod. 2.5.10.
- 89 Pisander fr. 6 Davies, Panyasis fr. 7a Davies respectively.
- 90 Pher. 3F18
- 91 Apollod. 2.5.10; cf. from early tradition Hes. *Theog.* 287–94, 982–3, Stes. 186.
- 92 Str. 3.5.5.
- 93 D.S. 4.18.4–5 (both possibilities), cf. Pliny *N.H.* 3.4, Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 235ff (opened straits). Early reference to raising of pillars, Pi. *Nem.* 3.21–6.
- 94 Ael. *V.H.* 5.3 (Arist. fr. 678 Rose), Euphorion fr. 166 Powell, Parthenius fr. 31.
- 95 Str. 3.5.3–5.
- 96 Str. 4.1.7, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.41.3, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.6. The episode was mentioned in the *Prometheus Unbound*, Aesch. fr. 199 Radt.
- 97 D.S. 4.21–4.

- 98 Hellenic. 4F111, Apollod. 2.5.10, cf. Varro *Re. Rust.* 2.1.9, Aulus Gellius 11.1.2.
- 99 Apollod. 2.5.10.
- 100 D.S. 4.23.2–3, Paus. 3.16.4–5; on Dorieus, see also Hdt. 5.42–8.
- 101 D.S. 4.24.7, Serv. *Aen.* 3.552; see also Ov. *Met.* 15.12–59 (the city's foundation legend; mentions Heracles' visit to the site, but not the Lacinios episode).
- 102 Conon 3 (Latinos in MSS, sometimes amended to Lacinios).
- 103 D.S. 4.23.1.
- 104 Livy 1.7.3–15, Propertius 4.9, Verg. *Aen.* 8.190–279, Ov. *Fast.* 1.543–84, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.39; on Caca, Serv. *Aen.* 8.190.
- 105 D.H. 1.40.3–5.
- 106 Apollod. 2.5.10.
- 107 Hdt. 4.8–10.
- 108 Hom. *Il.* 8.367–8, Hom. *Od.* 11.623–6.
- 109 Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 23, Apollod. 2.5.12, etc.
- 110 Serv. *Aen.* 6.392, Vat. Myth. 2.150.
- 111 Bacch. 5.56–175, cf. Pi. fr. 249a SM.
- 112 Apollod. 2.5.12.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Schol. *Il.* 5.395.
- 115 D.S. 4.26.1.
- 116 Respectively Apollod. 2.5.12 (cf. Paus. 2.31.2), Paus. 2.35.7, schol. A.R. 2.354 citing Herodorus (= 31F31) and Euphion (= fr. 37 Powell).
- 117 Apollod. 2.5.12 (adopted by Pylios, initiated by Eumolpos), Plut. *Thes.* 33 (Pylios), D.S. 4.25.1 (initiated by Mousaios), 4.14.3 (Demeter founds Lesser Mysteries).
- 118 Schol. A.R. 2.354.
- 119 First in A.R. 4.1396.
- 120 Apollod. 2.5.11 (cf. Odysseus' interrogation of the shape-shifting Proteus, Hom. *Od.* 4.454ff).
- 121 Pher. 3F17, Apollod. 2.5.11.
- 122 Apollod. 2.5.11, D.S. 4.17.4, Pi. *Isth.* 4.52–4.
- 123 Ov. *Met.* 9. 183–4, *Ibis* 393–5.
- 124 Apollod. 2.5.11, Lucan 4.593–653.
- 125 Ov. *Met.* 9.183–4.
- 126 Pi. *Pyth.* 9.106, Pher. 3F75, 76.
- 127 Plut. *Sertorius* 9, Str. 17.3.8.
- 128 Apollod. 2.5.11, cf. Pher. 3F17, D.S. 4.18.1, 4.27.3.
- 129 Pher. 3F17.
- 130 D.S. 4.27.3.
- 131 Apollod. 2.5.11.
- 132 Ibid., Pher. 3F17, D.S. 4.15.2.
- 133 Apollod. 2.5.4.
- 134 Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 1026–9.
- 135 Apollod. 2.5.11, Pher. 3F17.
- 136 Panyasis fr. 10 Davies, Soph. *Trach.* 1090–1, 1099–1100, Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 394–9, A.R. 4.1393–1405.
- 137 Eratosth. 4, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.6.
- 138 Apollod. 2.5.11.
- 139 Ibid. 2.6.1, D.S. 4.31.1.
- 140 Apollod. 2.6.1, cf. Herodorus 31F37, D.S. 4.31.1–2.
- 141 Respectively D.S. 4.31.1–2, Apollod. 2.6.2, schol. *Od.* 21.22. Apollodorus is exceptional in referring to cattle rather than horses.
- 142 D.S. 4.31.2, cf. Soph. *Trach.* 269–73, schol. *Od.* 21.22 (= Pher. 3F82b, but doubtful); see Hom. *Od.* 21.22–30 for an early account of the murder of Iphitos.
- 143 Apollod. 2.6.2.
- 144 Ibid., D.S. 4.31.4–5.
- 145 Pher. 3F82b (sold by Hermes for three talents), Apollod. 2.6.2 (Eurytos refuses money); cf. Soph. *Trach.* 247–52 (sold into slavery for a year), D.S. 4.31.5–7 (sold by friend abroad, compensation paid to sons of Iphitos), Hyg. *Fab.* 32 (sold).
- 146 D.S. 4.31.5–7.

- 147 Apollod. 2.6.2, Paus. 10.13.4, Plut. *Moralia* 557c; first definite literary reference, Cicero *N.D.* 3.16.42, possible early reference, Pi. *Ol.* 9.32–3.
- 148 E.g. Ov. *Heroides* 9.55ff, Lucian *D.D.* 13.2, Plut. *Quaest.Gr.* 45.
- 149 Athen 415bc, schol. Theoc. 10.41, Pollux *Onomast.* 4.54.
- 150 Apollod. 2.6.2–3, D.S. 4.31.7 (killed Syleus with own hoe).
- 151 Conon 17.
- 152 Eur. *Syleus* fr. (687–94 Nauck).
- 153 Apollod. 2.6.3, D.S. 4.31.7 (no details); Zenob. 5.10, Apostol. 11.19; petrification, Pher. 3F77, Suda s.v. Kerkopes.
- 154 D.S. 4.31.7, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.14 respectively.
- 155 D.S. 4.33.2, 4.34.1, Paus. 8.14.1–3.
- 156 Apollod. 2.5.9, cf. Hom. *Il.* 5.648–51, Hellanic. 4F26b (substitution).
- 157 Hellan. 4F26b.
- 158 Lyc. 33–7.
- 159 D.S. 4.42.
- 160 Hom. *Il.* 5.638–42.
- 161 D.S. 4.32.3–4.
- 162 Apollod. 2.6.4, Hellanic. 4F109 (Alexikakos).
- 163 Apollod. 2.6.4, cf. Soph. *Ajax* 434–6, 1299–1303, Hyg. *Fab.* 89.
- 164 Apollod. 3.12.7.
- 165 Pher. 3F78; early references to episode, Hom. *Il.* 14.250–61, 15.24–30, Pi. *Nem.* 4.26 and *Isth.* 6.31–2.
- 166 Hom. *Il.* 2.676–9, Pher. 3F78 (Thessalos fathered on Chalciope).
- 167 Apollod. 2.7.1.
- 168 Plut. *Quaest. Gr.* 58.
- 169 E.g. Apollod. 2.7.2, schol. *Il.* 23.638, 641.
- 170 Hes. fr. 17, Apollod. 2.7.2.
- 171 Hom. *Il.* 11.750–2, 23.638–42.
- 172 Ibycus 285.
- 173 Pi. *Ol.* 9.26–34.
- 174 Apollod. 2.7.2.
- 175 Paus. 5.2.1–2; *ibid.* 8.14.9 (Iphicles killed by Molionides).
- 176 Apollod. 2.7.2, cf. Pi. *Ol.* 10.34–8 (city destroyed), D.S. 4.33.4, Paus. 5.3.1 (different version in which Augeias is spared).
- 177 Schol. *Il.* 11.690 and Isocr. 6.19 respectively.
- 178 Hom. *Il.* 11.688–92.
- 179 Hes. fr. 33a.12–19, A.R. 156–60; sometimes described as a son of Poseidon, e.g. schol. *Il.* 2.336.
- 180 Hes. fr. 33b, Apollod. 2.7.3.
- 181 Schol. A.R. 1.156, Ov. *Met.* 12.555–72, Hyg. *Fab.* 10 respectively.
- 182 Hes. fr. 33a, Apollod. 2.7.3, Paus. 3.26.8 (Nestor at Gerenia; Gerenios is an epithet of Nestor in the *Iliad*, e.g. 9.162).
- 183 Hom. *Il.* 5.395–7 (disputed passage about Heracles' wounding of Hades) with schol. *ibid.* 398–402 (to Olympos to be healed); Pi. *Ol.* 9.29–35 with schol. 43, 44a; Apollod. 2.7.3 (Hades wounded while assisting Pylians); Paus. 6.25.2–3 (Heracles assisting Eleian Pylians).
- 184 Hes. *Shield* 357–67, Panyasis fr.6 Davies.
- 185 Apollod. 2.7.3, Paus. 3.15.3 respectively.
- 186 Apollod. 2.7.3, Paus. 3.15.4.
- 187 Pi. *Ol.* 10.65–6.
- 188 Apollod. 2.7.3.
- 189 *Ibid.* (Cepheus and sons and Iphikles killed), D.S. 4.33.5–6 (three sons of Cepheus survive).
- 190 Paus. 3.15.5, 3.19.7, Sosibius 595F13.
- 191 Apollod. 2.7.3
- 192 D.S. 4.34.1.
- 193 Soph. *Trach.* 6–26, Apollod. 2.7.5, Ov. *Met.* 9.1–88; see also Archil. 286 (lost poem that told how Heracles courted Deianeira and fought the tauriform Acheloos).
- 194 Apollod. 2.7.5, Pi. fr. 249a SM.
- 195 Origin of horn, Zenob. 2.48; early references to it, Anacreon 361, Pher. 3F42; Amaltheia as goat itself, Call. *Hymn* 1.47–8 with schol.
- 196 Ov. *Fasti* 5.111–28, Hyg. *Fab.* 31; for rationalizations, see D.S. 4.35.4.

- 197 Ov. *Met.* 9.85–8.
- 198 Their children, e.g. Hes. fr. 25.17–19, D.S. 4.37.1–2, Paus. 1.32.5 (Macaria).
- 199 Apollod. 2.7.6, D.S. 4.36.1 (king here named Phyleus).
- 200 Apollod. 2.7.6, D.S. 4.36.2–3, cf. Hellanic. 4F2 and Herodorus 31F3 (both in Athen. 410f–411a), Paus. 2.13.8 (disliked something that the boy gave him to drink), schol. A.R. 1.1212 (used water from foot-bath).
- 201 Soph. *Trach.* 555–77, Apollod. 2.7.6, D.S. 4.36.3–5, Hyg. *Fab.* 34; early references, Archil. 286–9, Bacch. 16.31–5 (baneful gift from Nessos).
- 202 Schol. A.R. 1.1212.
- 203 Apollod. 2.7.7.
- 204 D.S. 4.37.1, with Paus. 4.34.9; Dryopians in Messenia, Paus. 4.8.3.
- 205 See Hdt. 1.56, 8.31 and 8.43.
- 206 Ibid., D.S. 4.36.5, Paus. 1.32.5.
- 207 Hes. *Shield* 253–6.
- 208 Apollod. 2.7.7, D.S. 4.37.2–4.
- 209 Schol. Pi. *Ol.* 2.147 and Stes. 207 respectively.
- 210 Hes. *Shield* 57–67.
- 211 Ibid. 68ff (stirred up by Apollo), 367–422 (the fight).
- 212 Ibid. 424–66.
- 213 Ibid. 472–80.
- 214 Apollod. 2.7.7.
- 215 Ibid. 2.5.11, Hyg. *Fab.* 31.
- 216 Stes. 207.
- 217 D.S. 4.37.4, Apollod. 2.7.7; Str. 9.5.18 (on Ormenion).
- 218 *Oichalia Halosis* fr. 2 Davies (see Paus. 4.2.3 and Str. 9.5.17), Soph. *Trach.* 74.
- 219 Apollod. 2.7.7., D.S. 4.37.5, cf. Hes. fr. 26.28–33, Soph. *Trach.* 351ff.
- 220 Plutarch *Moralia* 208F.
- 221 Apollod. 2.7.7, D.S. 4.38.1–2, cf., Ov. *Met.* 9.136ff.
- 222 Hes. fr. 25.20–5, Bacch. 16.13–35.
- 223 Soph. *Trach.* 232ff. Deianeira asks Lichas to take the robe to Heracles, 600ff.; its effects reported to her, 750ff.
- 224 Soph. *Trach.* 772–82, Apollod. 2.7.7.
- 225 Ov. *Met.* 9.211–29, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 36 (rock appeared in sea at place where he fell).
- 226 Str. 9.4.4.
- 227 Apollod. 2.7.7, D.S. 4.38.3, Soph. *Trach.* 930–1 (Deianeira stabbed herself), 971ff (Heracles' arrival in Trachis), Paus. 2.23.5 (her tomb near Trachis or at Argos).
- 228 Apollod. 2.7.7.
- 229 Soph. *Trach.* 1157ff, cf. Aesch. fr.73b Radt.
- 230 D.S. 4.38.3–4.
- 231 Poias lights pyre, Apollod. 2.7.7; Philoctetes does so, D.S. 4.38.4, Ov. *Met.* 9.233ff, Seneca *Herc. Oet.* 1485–7, Hyg. *Fab.* 36, etc.
- 232 Hom. *Il.* 18.117–19.
- 233 Hom. *Od.* 11.601–27; interpolation 602–4.
- 234 Hes. *Theog.* 949–55.
- 235 Apollod. 2.7.7, Ov. *Met.* 9. 271–2.
- 236 Lucian *Hermotimus* 7, Ov. *Met.* 9.250–5, 262–72, Seneca *Herc. Oet.* 965–71, cf. Theoc. 24.82–3, Call. *Hymn* 4.159.
- 237 D.S. 4.38.4–5.
- 238 Hom. *Od.* 11.602–4, Hes. *Theog.* 949–55 (but see pp. 285–6 on the late origin of these passages); Hes. fr. 25.26–33, Pi. *Nem.* 1.69–72, 10.17–18, *Isthm.* 4.55–60, Eur. *Heraclidae* 910–18, Ov. *Met.* 9.242ff, Apollod. 2.7.7.
- 239 Apollod. 2.7.7.
- 240 D.S. 4.39.2, schol. Lyc. 39.

12

The return of the Heraclids

The adventures of the sons and descendants of Heracles and Deianeira form the subject of an important legend, or body of legend, extending over four or more generations, which tells how the Heraclids eventually established themselves in the main centres of the Peloponnese after various setbacks. Since they were said to have accomplished their aim with the help of a mainly Dorian invasion force, this legend of the 'return' of the Heraclids provides a mythological account of the Dorian migration to the Peloponnese, the so-called Dorian invasion. The Heraclids could lay claim to Mycenae and the Perseid lands of the Argolid by virtue of Heracles' Perseid descent, and they could thus be described as having returned to their ancestral homeland. The Greek word for their enterprise, *kathodos*, was in fact doubly suitable, because it could mean both return and descent: by descending from Central Greece into the Peloponnese, they were returning to the land of their forebears to claim an inheritance that circumstances had denied to Heracles himself. Since he had settled the succession at the two other main centres in the Peloponnese, namely at Sparta (see p. 264) and at Pylos (see p. 263, then the dominant city of Messenia), they could also lay claim with some show of plausibility to the two southern lands of the peninsula.

Although all the children and descendants of Heracles could be described as Heraclids (just as all descendants of Inachos are Inachids), the name was applied in particular to his legitimate sons and their descendants who took part in this enterprise, the final accomplishment of which was destined to be delayed until many decades after the hero's death. His half-cousin Eurystheus tried to destroy his family after his death, but Eurystheus and his sons were killed during the ensuing conflict, and the Heraclids then assumed the offensive by trying to invade the Peloponnese. Their initial hopes were frustrated, however, for reasons that will be considered shortly, and the final conquest would not be achieved until well after the Trojan War, fifty years after it ended according to the usual tradition. The legend of the return thus takes us almost to the very end of the mythical era. The conquest had to be dated to this late period because it was well-established in the early tradition that Pelopids still ruled at Mycenae and Sparta, and Neleids at Pylos, for a generation or two after the Trojan War, and the Dorians were known moreover to have been latecomers to the Peloponnese. It was explained that the Dorians supported the Heraclids in their enterprise as a result of the ties that Heracles had established with

them by helping Aigimios in his war against the Lapiths (see p. 267), when they were still living in northern Thessaly. Since the Dorians, as a people of northern origin, could have had no prior claim to any territory in the Peloponnese, this legend provided a mythical justification for their settlement in the peninsula, by presenting them as having been led by Heraclids who had founded the royal lines in the conquered territories on the basis of legitimate claims.

We should not expect to discover anything of value about the historical movement of peoples from this body of legend, any more than from the mythical account of the Ionian settlement of Asia Minor that came to be brought into connection with it (see p. 284). It was a mythical construction, which was of relatively late origin for the most part, and there is good reason to suppose, moreover, that the story of the Dorian invasion was first brought into connection with the return of the Heraclids at a secondary stage. It should be remembered, besides, that the migration of the Dorians to the areas where they settled would not have been an invasion of the kind described in the myth, but a very gradual process.

Eurystheus meets his own death while trying to eliminate the Heraclids

When Heracles was no longer available to protect his sons, Eurystheus naturally attempted to eliminate them, to ensure that his own branch of the family would be able to maintain its dominance in the Perseid lands of the Argolid in the long term. The Heraclids initially sought refuge with Ceux, king of Trachis, in southern Thessaly, who had been a host and friend of Heracles during the last period of his life (see p. 266).¹ Although this was thus an obvious choice for them, he was not a sufficiently powerful ruler to be able to protect them in the face of threats from Eurystheus, and they soon had to take flight again, passing southward to Athens, a much more powerful kingdom, where they claimed sanctuary by seating themselves on the altar of Eleos (Pity or Mercy personified). This proved to be a more fortunate choice of refuge, since the king and his people not only refused to hand them over to Eurystheus when he arrived in pursuit, but offered to fight in support of them in the conflict that ensued.²

The interlude at Trachis, which serves no real function in the story other than perhaps to underline the power of Eurystheus, would seem to be the product of the reworking of an earlier tradition in which Hyllus, the eldest son of Heracles and Deianeira, had settled at Trachis after his father's death, and had reared his family there (for he had no lands to inherit from Heracles, who had always been an exile and a wanderer). When the present legend of the return was developed, he and the other Heraclids were presented as merely having taken temporary refuge with Ceux, while a mightier and more glorious ally was enlisted for them in the form of the king of Athens. That king was named either as Theseus or his son Demophon, with careless disregard for the normal mythical tradition in either case, since neither could have been on the throne at the time in question, after the death of Heracles and not long before the Trojan War; for Theseus had to go into exile immediately

after he was rescued from the Underworld by Heracles (see p. 315), and Demophon, if he ever became king of Athens, did not recover his father's throne until after the Trojan War (see pp. 316ff).

In the earliest full portrayal of the ensuing events in Euripides' *Heraclidae*, a herald who has been sent out by Eurystheus arrives at Marathon, in north-eastern Attica, to demand the surrender of the Heraclids, who are staying there along with Alcmene and Iolaos, the mother and nephew of Heracles. After listening to the representations of the herald and those of Iolaos, who is now an old man, Demophon, king of Athens, rejects the herald's demands and promises to support the Heraclids in the conflict that is now bound to ensue.³ A problem arises when it is revealed by an oracle that a girl of noble birth must be brought to sacrifice if the enemy are to be defeated, but it is resolved when Macaria, the only daughter of Heracles and Deianeira, offers herself up for sacrifice for the sake of her family.⁴ The course of the fighting, after the Argives arrive within sight of Athens, is described in the play by a messenger. Hyllos offers to fight Eurystheus in single combat, but the cowardly king refuses to do so. When the Argive army is eventually put to flight and Hyllos sets off in pursuit of Eurystheus, the aged Iolaos asks to be taken on to his chariot, and appeals to the gods to have his youth restored for a day to enable him to exact retribution against Eurystheus. Iolaos duly captures him by the Sceironian rocks in the Megarid, the neighbouring region to the west, ties him up, and brings him back to Athens, where he is put to death at the insistence of Alcmene after some debate among the Heraclids.⁵

Quite the most surprising element in this story is the central role that is ascribed to the ageing nephew of Heracles. This was evidently an idea that was taken over from the previous tradition, since Pindar mentions in passing that Iolaos cut off the head of Eurystheus; this apparently occurred near Thebes, and the poet states that Iolaos was buried there soon afterwards beside the grave of Amphitryon.⁶ In connection with this passage, Pindar's ancient commentators refer to an account in which Iolaos was already dead by this time and prayed to be restored to life temporarily to confront Eurystheus; and rightly or wrongly, they claim that this was the original version of this story, which was subsequently rationalized to some degree through the suggestion that Iolaos was merely rejuvenated.⁷ In later accounts Hyllos tends in any case to take over his role as the man who captured or killed Eurystheus.⁸

To pass on to the narratives of later mythographers, Apollodorus states that the five sons of Eurystheus were killed in the fighting, and that Eurystheus himself was caught by the Sceironian rocks as usual, but now by Hyllos, who cut off his head and took it back to Alcmene, who gouged out the eyes of the dead king with weaving-pins.⁹ In Diodorus' version, the Heraclids chose Iolaos as their leader, and he directed operations in the war together with Theseus and Hyllos. After losing all of his sons in battle, Eurystheus was killed by Hyllos after his chariot was wrecked while he was trying to flee to safety.¹⁰ His head was said to have been buried at Marathon separately from his body, beside a spring that was named after the aforementioned Macaria.¹¹

The return of the Heraclids is delayed until well after the Trojan War

Now that Eurystheus and his sons were dead, the Heraclids could believe that they were in a position to return to their ancestral homeland in the Peloponnese; but for reasons that have already been explained, that could not be achieved until considerably later, well after the Trojan War. So it was necessary that a mythical explanation should be offered to account not only for their failure on the present occasion, but also for the long delay that would ensue after that initial failure. Two main stories were put forward for that purpose. In one Hyllus, who was leader of the Heraclids during this first invasion, fought in single combat with a Peloponnesian champion, on the sworn agreement that if he were defeated, the Heraclids would stay away from the Peloponnese for fifty or a hundred years, i.e. for the full period of the delay. Or, according to the other account, an oracle ordered them to withdraw from the Peloponnese after they mounted a successful initial invasion, and they then met with defeat in successive generations, as a result of their misinterpretation of subsequent oracles, when they repeatedly tried to invade before the proper time. As is indicated most clearly in the latter version, the delay was not merely accidental but was providentially ordained.

To start the simpler version, which is first recounted by Herodotus, the Heraclids tried to force their way into the Peloponnese soon after the death of Eurystheus, but were confronted by a strong Peloponnesian army at the Isthmus of Corinth. This anachronistic notion of a united Peloponnesian force, anticipating the Peloponnesian League, which was first established in the sixth century BC, gives some indication of the late origin of this legend. Wanting to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, Hyllus suggested that the issue should be settled by a duel between himself and a champion from the opposing army, on the sworn condition that the Heraclids would be able to reclaim their ancestral rights in the Peloponnese if Hyllus won, but would attempt no further incursion for a hundred years (or fifty years) if he should lose. Echemos, son of Aeropos, the king of Tegea in Arcadia, volunteered to fight on behalf of the Peloponnesians and killed Hyllus in the ensuing fight. So the Heraclids were obliged to withdraw, and stayed away until the agreed period had elapsed. In view of the service that Echemos had performed for the Peloponnesians at this early period, the Tegeans claimed the privilege of holding one of the wings whenever they served in a Peloponnesian army.¹²

In the second and more elaborate account, the Heraclids were successful in their first invasion of the Peloponnese and captured most of its main cities; but a plague broke out a year later, and an oracle declared that the Heraclids were to blame because they had returned before the proper time. So they withdrew to Attica and settled at Marathon for the time being. Whether by the same oracle or a different one, the former subjects of Eurystheus at Mycenae were instructed to choose a Pelopid as their new ruler, and the resulting accession of Thyestes, son of Pelops, and then his brother Atreus (see p. 422), marked the beginning of an interlude of Pelopid rule at Mycenae and subsequently at Sparta. After leading the Heraclids out of the Peloponnese, Hyllus consulted the Delphic oracle about when they could properly

return, and was told that they should wait 'until the third harvest'. Naturally assuming that this meant three years (rather than three generations), he led an army into the Peloponnese at that time, only to meet his death. There is a gap in the relevant text at this point, but even if he was killed by Echemos at the Isthmus, it would not have been as the result of a duel on the above-mentioned terms; for the Heraclids continued to seek oracles to find out when they should return, and when we are able to pick up the story again, Hyllos' grandson ARISTOMACHOS is consulting the Delphic oracle about a fresh invasion (possibly after a failed attempt by his father Cleodaios).

On being told that the invasion would succeed if the Heraclids approached the Peloponnese 'by the narrow route', Aristomachos led them across the narrow Isthmus of Corinth, but was defeated and killed nonetheless. When Aristomachos' eldest son, TEMENOS, came of age, he consulted the Delphic oracle once again (together with his two brothers in one account), and was surprised to receive the same advice as before. On further questioning, the god explained that the Heraclids had brought their previous misfortunes on themselves by misinterpreting his oracles. For when he had spoken of the third harvest, he had meant the third generation of men rather than the third harvest of the earth; and when he had spoken of the narrow route, he had meant the short sea-route across the narrow Gulf of Corinth rather than the land-route across the narrow Isthmus. Since Temenos and his two brothers, Cresphontes and Aristodemos, belonged to the third generation after Hyllos and were now aware of the proper route, they could make preparations in the confident belief that success lay within their grasp.¹³

The Heraclids invade the Peloponnese with their Dorian allies and draw lots for the three main kingdoms

Temenos assembled an army at Naupactos on the northern shores of the Corinthian Gulf, and constructed a fleet of ships to ferry them across to the north coast of the Peloponnese.¹⁴ The force consisted of Dorians for the most part. While it was still at Naupactos, a priest of Apollo, Carnos by name, arrived there and wandered among the troops delivering oracles in an inspired frenzy. Although he meant no harm, they took him for a sorcerer who had been sent by the enemy to cause their destruction. So Hippotes, son of Phylas, one of the Heraclids, killed him with his spear, provoking Apollo to afflict the army with a famine and cause the destruction of the fleet. When Temenos sought the advice of the Delphic oracle, he was told that the murderer should be banished for ten years and that the Heraclids should take 'the three-eyed one' as their guide.¹⁵ Hippotes would father a son Aletes during his wandering who would become the first Heraclid ruler of Corinth (see p. 283), and as for the enigmatic advice of the oracle, its meaning remained a mystery to them until they came across a man riding on a one-eyed horse (or driving a one-eyed mule). This was OXYLOS, son of Andraimon, a member of the Aetolian royal family who had been exiled for killing his brother or some other person and was now returning home

after spending a year in Elis; his horse had only a single eye because it had been struck in the other by an arrow. He agreed to act as guide to the Heraclids and their Dorian allies, and advised that they should make their crossing further to the west, starting at the Aetolian town of Molycrion.¹⁶ After they arrived in the Peloponnese, he conducted them through Arcadia to attack TEISAMENOS, son of Orestes, the last Pelopid ruler of Argos and Sparta. The Peloponnesians were defeated as the oracle had foretold, and Teisamenos himself was either killed in battle or escaped to Aigialos (Achaëa) on the north coast, where he was killed soon afterwards nonetheless (see p. 379). The Heraclids were then able to take possession of Argos and Sparta, the two most important realms in the Peloponnese, and they also seized control of Messenia, driving its Neleid royal family into exile.¹⁷

Oxylos for his part asked to be granted the throne of Elis, in the north-west corner of the Peloponnese, as a reward for his services. Since the Aetolian royal family had originally come from Elis (see pp. 381ff), he could claim to rule there with some legitimacy.¹⁸ Arcadia, on the western fringes of Elis, was another region of the Peloponnese not settled by the Dorians, and it was explained that it retained its autonomy because Cypselos, who was ruling there at the time, reached an accommodation with the Heraclids through a marriage-alliance by offering his daughter to Cresphontes (see p. 550).

After completing their conquest of the Peloponnese, the Heraclid leaders cast lots to determine who should rule each of the three main kingdoms of Sparta, Argos, and Messenia. The senior members of the family in this generation were the three sons of Aristomachos, namely **Temenos**, **Cresphontes**, and **Aristodemos**, who were three great-grandsons of Hyllus, son of Heracles (see Table 6). Aristodemos was usually said to have died, however, before the final invasion was accomplished. Apollodorus states without further explanation that he was struck by a thunderbolt while the army was at Naupactos; or else he was murdered at Delphi by Medon and Strophios, sons of Pylades and Electra, who were cousins of Teisamenos and thus had good reason to want to take action against the Heraclids.¹⁹ The Spartans disagreed with everyone else, however, and insisted that Aristodemos had survived to become the first Heraclid king of Sparta. In that case he himself would have taken part in the drawing of the lots, but in the usual tradition his share of the inheritance was allotted to his infant sons **Procles** and **Eurysthenes**.

Cresphontes was so anxious to gain possession of Messenia, the fertile south-western region of the Peloponnese, that he rigged the draw to ensure that he did. In most accounts he achieved that as follows. After it had been agreed that the three parties should cast their lots into a water-jug, he proposed that the first lots should be drawn for Sparta and Argos, leaving Messenia for the one whose lot remained behind in the jug; and he cast a ball of compacted earth into the jug as his own lot, rather than a pebble as the others did, so ensuring that the other lots would be drawn because his own would dissolve in the water.²⁰ This tale was devised to justify or at least account for the division of power in the Peloponnese from the seventh century BC onwards, after Messenia fell under Spartan control; for it could be claimed in terms of the myth that the Heraclid rulers of Messenia eventually lost their ill-gotten gains to legitimate claimants.

In another account, the ruse was executed in a somewhat different way and in different circumstances. It had been agreed in this case from the beginning that wealthy Argos should go to Temenos as the eldest brother, and Cresphontes asked that Messenia should go to him as his preferred kingdom because he was the next eldest; but Theras, who was representing the sons of Aristodemos (see below), refused to agree, and the matter had to be submitted to a draw. Cresphontes then persuaded Temenos to collude with him in rigging the draw. So Temenos put two clay lots into a water-jug, one for Cresphontes and one for the sons of Aristodemos, on the agreement that the party whose lot was drawn first should have first choice of territory; but while making the lots, he had baked that of Cresphontes in a fire while merely drying the other in the sun, and the latter dissolved in the water, ensuring that Cresphontes was awarded his choice of kingdom.²¹ In addition to suggesting that the Heraclid rulers of Messenia had won the land by improper means, this version also provided a mythical explanation for the long-lasting hostility between Sparta and Argos, which could be said to have taken its start from the deception that was worked on this occasion by Temenos.

The first Heraclid rulers of Sparta, Messenia, and Argos

As a result of the draw, however unsatisfactory it may have been, Temenos became the first Heraclid king of Argos, and Cresphontes that of Messenia, while Sparta was allotted to the sons of Aristodemos or to Aristodemos himself.

If Sparta was allotted to Procles and Eurysthenes, the infant sons of Aristodemos, after the death of their father, as the usual tradition suggested, THERAS, son of Autesion, who was descended from the kings of Thebes (see p. 364), ruled from the beginning on their behalf as regent, after having represented them during the draw. He gained this position because his sister ARGEIA had married Aristodemos and was the mother of his heirs.²² Or, according to the Spartan tradition, Aristodemos became the first Heraclid king of Sparta, and Theras assumed his position somewhat later, when Aristodemos died after no great length of time. In that case, Argeia gave birth to his twin sons in Sparta shortly before his death, and a problem arose after he died because they were identical, and it was thus impossible to decide who should become king as the elder of the two. Although Argeia knew, she refused to say, because she wanted both of them to inherit the throne, and the Delphic oracle, when consulted on the matter, declared that they should indeed rule as joint kings, but that greater honour should be granted to the elder. The Spartans finally managed to discover which was the elder by observing which of the two was fed and washed first by his mother.²³

Whether they or their father were the first to rule, their joint assumption of the throne provided a mythical explanation for the origin and nature of the peculiar institution of the joint monarchy at Sparta. For according to this legend, they married twin sisters, Lathria and Anaxandra, daughters of Thersandros, son of Agamedides, another Heraclid,²⁴ and the Agiad royal house, which was accorded a certain precedence in ceremonial matters at least, traced its descent to Eurysthenes through his son Agis, while the Eurypontid royal house traced its descent to the

younger twin Procles, through his grandson Eurypion, son of Soas. In accordance with the common pattern in which mythical twins are either the best of friends or worst of enemies, Procles and Eurysthenes were said to have quarrelled throughout their lives, hence the discord that often prevailed between the two royal houses in historical times.²⁵

The first Heraclid rulers of Argos and Messenia both met violent ends. TEMENOS, king of Argos, provoked trouble within his own family by favouring Deiphontes, the Heraclid husband of his daughter Hynetho, above his three sons. Fearing for their inheritance, the sons of Temenos hired some people to murder their father. This achieved nothing for them in one version of the story, because the Argives were so shocked by their crime that they drove them out and transferred the kingdom to Hynetho and her husband;²⁶ or else Ceisos, the eldest son of Temenos, managed to seize the throne, and Deiphontes was obliged to withdraw to Epidaurus with many Argive followers.²⁷ As a matter of historical fact, the monarchy at Argos was not a long-lasting institution like the dual monarchy at Sparta. According to Pausanias' account of the legendary tradition, the Argives reduced the authority of the monarchy at such an early period that even Medon, the son and successor of the above-mentioned Ceisos, was a monarch in no more than name, and the monarchy itself was abolished nine generations later.²⁸

CRESPHONTES, the first Heraclid king of Messenia, married Merope, the daughter of Cypselos, king of Arcadia, who bore him three sons; but after he had been on the throne for a relatively short time, a certain Polyphontes, who was also of Heraclid descent, mounted a revolt and killed him along with his two of his sons to seize the throne. His youngest son Aipyros survived, however, because Merope had entrusted him to her father to be reared in Arcadia, and he returned in secret when he came of age and killed Polyphontes to recover his father's kingdom.²⁹ Or else he returned openly and recovered the throne by force with help from the Arcadians and other Peloponnesian rulers;³⁰ and he then gained such a reputation among rich and poor alike for his just rule that the kings of Messenia were known as Aipyrids rather than Heraclids from that time onwards.³¹

In an early account of this story from a lost play by Euripides, the *Cresphontes*, the son who survived was called Cresphontes like his father rather than Aipyros, and Merope saved him by hiding him away at the time of Deiphontes' revolt and sending him to Aetolia. So far as the story can be reconstructed from fragments and other records, Polyphontes was aware that the child had survived, and promised a reward of gold to anyone who would kill him; but he grew up unharmed and later returned to Messenia to avenge his father's death. He approached Polyphontes under a false name and told him that he had come to claim the reward for having killed the prince. While he was sleeping as a guest in the palace, his mother Merope, who had been forced into marriage with Polyphontes in the meantime, entered his room with an axe to kill him in the belief that he had murdered her son; but an old servant who was aware of his true identity warned her just in time. She then made a show of friendliness to Polyphontes and suggested that their guest should be invited to assist at a sacrifice; and when the young man was given a sword for that purpose, he plunged it into Polyphontes and so recovered his father's kingdom.³²

How Heraclids came to establish ruling lines in Rhodes, Corinth, and Macedonia; Theras on the island of Thera

There were also other legends in which Heraclids were said to have founded ruling lines in places that had Dorian populations in historical times. A very ancient legend, which is already mentioned in the *Iliad*, told how TLEPOLEMOS, a son of Heracles, led many followers to the island of Rhodes to found the Dorian settlements there. According to Homer, Heracles fathered him by a certain Astydameia, whom he had brought from Ephyra, a city in Epirus in north-western Greece, after sacking many cities in the area; and he had to depart into exile at some point because he killed his father's aged maternal uncle Licymnios (see p. 235) in unexplained circumstances. So he built a fleet of ships, gathered together many followers, and led them to Rhodes, where they settled the three great Dorian cities of Lindos, Ialysos, and Cameiros. Great wealth was poured down on the Dorians of Rhodes by Zeus, and Tlepolemos later led Dorians from these cities in nine ships to Troy, where he was killed in battle by Sarpedon.³³

Subsequent authors offer more detailed accounts of the killing of Licymnios. According to Pindar, who states that the incident took place at Tiryns, Tlepolemos struck Licymnios with an olive-wood staff as he was emerging from the room of his mother Midea; although the deed was apparently committed in anger, no explanation is offered for it. Tlepolemos then sailed away to Rhodes at the order of the Delphic oracle.³⁴ In some later accounts, he is said to have struck his great-uncle accidentally, either while aiming a blow at a slave who was helping the aged Licymnios along in a careless fashion, or because Licymnios got in the way while he was beating a slave with a stick.³⁵ This episode must have occurred well before the Heraclids made their final return to the Peloponnese (although it should be noted that the legend was developed at an earlier period than that of the return). Apollodorus states accordingly that it took place when the Heraclids first invaded the Peloponnese under the leadership of Hyllos, not long after the death of Heracles. According to a story that was invented with this specific point in mind, the citizens of Argos invited Tlepolemos and Licymnios to their city while the other Heraclids were excluded from the Peloponnese after the death of Hyllos, and the killing, which was placed in the Argolid from early times, occurred after they had settled there.³⁶

The important Dorian city of Corinth was said to have acquired a Heraclid ruler and a Dorian population within a generation of the return of the Heraclids, after having previously been under the rule of descendants of its founder Sisyphos (see p. 553). Hippotes, the Heraclid who was banished for killing a seer at Naupactos before the final invasion (see p. 279), fathered a son ALETES (Wanderer) during his subsequent wanderings, and this Aletes attacked Corinth with a force of Dorians and defeated the Corinthians in battle, forcing them to flee. Some said that he then drove out the Sisyphid rulers, while others said that they abdicated in his favour and were allowed to stay.³⁷ He later tried to conquer Athens, but was foiled on that occasion as we will see below. Aletes and his descendants ruled at Corinth for five generations until the monarchy was displaced by the Bacchiad oligarchy (in 747 BC according to the traditional reckoning). Sicyon, Corinth's neighbour to the west, was also said to

have been conquered by a Heraclid, in this case by Phalces, son of Temenos. Since the king of Sicyon, a certain Lacestades, was descended from a son of Heracles, Phalces allowed him to share the throne.³⁸

Far to the north, the kings of Macedonia claimed to be descended from another son of Temenos. For his son ARCHELAOS had been driven into exile by his brothers, so the story went, and had sought refuge in Macedonia with a local ruler called Cisseus. Being under attack from some neighbours at the time, Cisseus promised to award him the throne and his daughter's hand if he would put these enemies to flight. When Archelaos claimed his reward, however, after defeating these enemies in battle, Cisseus tried to kill him by means of a ruse; for he told his servants to dig a pit, to fill it with burning coals, and to cover it over with light branches so that Archelaos would fall in and be killed. But one of the king's slaves betrayed the secret to Archelaos, who lured the king to a private meeting and hurled him into his own fire-pit. On the advice of an oracle from Apollo, he then fled through Macedonia taking a she-goat (*aiga*) as a guide, and founded the city of Aigai, the royal capital of Macedonia, at the place to which he was led by the she-goat.³⁹ Such was the story that was apparently recounted in the lost *Archelaos* of Euripides. It may well have been invented by Euripides himself, who spent the final part of his life in Macedonia at the court of a historical Archelaos (reigned c. 413–399 BC). The idea of the fire-pit was evidently borrowed from a famous myth of Ixion (see p. 107). Other tales that credit the founding of the Macedonian monarchy to more distant descendants of Temenos can be found in Herodotus and Diodorus.⁴⁰

THERAS, who had acted as regent for the first Heraclid kings of Sparta, did not wish to remain there under their rule after ceding power to them, and so decided to sail away to Thera with some followers. As has been mentioned, he was not himself of Heraclid descent, but belonged to the old Theban royal family and had gained his position because his sister was married to the Heraclid leader Aristodemos (see p. 281). The island of Thera in the southern Aegean, which is formed from the remains of an ancient volcano that erupted in a massive explosion in about 1400 BC, was said to have been visited by Cadmos during his fruitless search for Europa (see p. 332). On that occasion he had installed some of his Phoenician followers there under the leadership of a certain Membliaros,⁴¹ and the island had thus remained under the rule of descendants of Membliaros until Theras arrived there eight generations later, and laid claim to the throne as a descendant of Cadmos. After having been known as Calliste (the Most Beautiful) up until then, it was now renamed Thera in his honour.⁴²

Theras was accompanied to his new home by some Dorian followers from Sparta (for Thera had a Dorian population in historical times) and also some descendants of the Argonauts. The island was supposed to have been formed from a clod of earth that the Argonaut Euphemos had received from the god of Lake Tritonis in Libya (see p. 410). He had thrown the clod into the sea at the appropriate time in response to a prophetic dream, which had revealed that the island would provide a home for his descendants;⁴³ and this now came to pass when descendants of his arrived there among the descendants of the Argonauts who accompanied Theras. This feature was introduced into the legend to enable a link to be established between the origin of

Thera and the founding of Cyrene, the most important Greek colony in Africa, which was founded from Thera in the mid-seventh century BC. When the Argonauts had called in at Lemnos during their outward journey, they had fathered children by the women of the island (see p. 400 for the circumstances), and descendants of these children were later expelled from Lemnos, so it was said, and settled in Laconia, where they married local women; but they behaved with such arrogance that their hosts turned against them, and some of them, including descendants of Euphemos, were thus happy to sail away with Theras when he invited them to do so. Battos, who founded Cyrene with colonists from Thera and Crete, was supposed to have been a descendant in the seventeenth generation of the Euphemos who had received the wondrous clod from Triton in North Africa, and his arrival in Africa thus marked the completion of a circle, through which the founding of the colony could be legitimized in mythical terms.⁴⁴ It may be noted, however, that this account of the mythical history of Thera is marred by a chronological inconsistency, since Cadmos could hardly have visited it if it was first formed in the time of the Argonauts, who must have lived several generations later than him.

How the Neleids settled in Athens after being expelled from Messenia by the Heraclids, and gained leading positions there; the Ionian settlement of Asia Minor

When the Neleids were driven out of Messenia to enable Cresphontes to take over the throne, most of them settled in Athens, where they attained positions of great eminence. The great Athenian family of the Alcmaionidai, which included Cleisthenes and Pericles among its members, was said to have been founded by one of these exiles, Alcmaion, son of Sillos, a great-grandson of Neleus, while another great family, that of the Paionidai, was founded by a Neleid called Paion.⁴⁵ One of the Neleid newcomers, MELANTHOS, was even said to have won the throne of Athens, by acquiring it from THYMOITES, son of Oxyntes, the last descendant of Theseus to rule there (see p. 317), in the following circumstances. During the reign of Thymoites, a war broke out between Attica and Boeotia, and the Boeotians proposed that the outcome should be settled by single combat between the kings of the two lands; and being none too brave, Thymoites was unwilling to take the risk, and offered to surrender the throne to anyone who was willing to fight the duel on his behalf. The challenge was taken up by Melanthos, who won the fight by means of a ruse, for as the king of Boeotia was drawing close to Xanthios (or Xanthos), Melanthos accused the king of having cheated by bringing a second man to support him, and when the king looked back in astonishment to see if someone was really following him, Melanthos hurled his spear at him and struck him dead. It was claimed that the Athenians celebrated their victory by founding their annual festival of the Apatouria, which could be said to recall the deception (*apate*) through its name.⁴⁶ A secondary version relieved Melanthos of the charge of deception by alleging that he called out to his opponent because he saw a phantom walking behind him.⁴⁷ Or, according to a wholly different tradition, he simply seized power

at Athens by killing Thymoites.⁴⁸

Melanthos was succeeded by his son CODROS, who was usually thought to have been the last king of Athens. During his reign Aletes, the first Heraclid king of Corinth (see above), marched against the city with a Dorian army after receiving an oracle that promised him victory if the Athenian king were not harmed. Codros came to hear of the oracle, however, and sacrificed his own life for the sake of his city by entering the enemy camp disguised as a woodcutter and provoking one of the troops to kill him. As soon as the Dorians discovered his true identity, they abandoned all hope of victory and withdrew; and the Athenians decided to have no more kings after Codros as a tribute to his incomparable patriotism. So his son MEDON became the first archon (senior magistrate) of Athens, or at least a ruler with restricted powers.⁴⁹

According to a tradition first recorded by the early mythographer Hellanicus, Medon's younger brother, NELEUS (or Neileus), played a leading part in the Ionian settlement of Asia Minor, by conducting Ionian followers to its west coast, where he founded twelve great cities. In Pausanias' legendary account of the events that led him to leave the land of his birth, it is indicated that Codros was not in fact the last king of Athens, since Neleus is said to have left because the crown was awarded to his elder brother Medon rather than to himself. For since Medon was lame in one foot, Neleus had refused to submit to his rule and accept him as the rightful successor, but the Delphic oracle confirmed that Medon should become the new king, saying that Neleus for his part should colonize Asia Minor along with the other sons of Codros and any Athenians who cared to accompany them.⁵⁰ Although Athens was of course an Ionian city, it is claimed in Pausanias' pseudo-historical account of the episode, which was evidently of late invention, that most of the Ionians who chose to go with Neleus and his brothers were Peloponnesian descendants of Ion who had recently arrived in Athens, during the reign of Melanthos, as a further consequence of the Dorian invasion of the Peloponnese, see further on p. 379.

Along with some contingents from other parts of Greece, the younger sons of Codros set off accordingly with a mixed force in which Ionians predominated. On arriving at the central region of the west coast of Asia Minor, the emigrants divided into separate groups to found the twelve main cities of the area, which was known as Ionia from that time forth. Some of these cities had independent foundation-myths of their own that had to be reconciled with this story. It was said, for instance, that Miletos had been founded long before by a young man from Crete called Miletos (see p. 300), but was now resettled by Neleus and a party of the newcomers, who killed all the male inhabitants (apart from those who fled) and married their wives and daughters.⁵¹ Since Neleus and his brothers were Neleid descendants of Nestor from Messenia (and thus of Deucalionid descent in the male line), this legend of the Ionian migration resembles that of the Dorian invasion of the Peloponnese in so far as the leaders in both cases were of different descent from their followers. Pausanias remarks in this very context that a similar pattern can be observed in other legends of the kind, since Heracles' half-brother Iolaos, an Inachid of Argive descent, was said to have led Athenian and Thespian colonists to Sardinia (see p. 239), while Theras, who was an Inachid of Theban descent, led Spartans and Minyans to

Notes

- 1 Apollod. 2.8.1, D.S. 4.57.2–4, Paus. 1.32.5; cf. Hecat. 1F30.
- 2 Eur. *Heraclidae* 1ff., Apollod. l.c. (altar of Mercy), D.S. 4.57.4, Paus. l.c. (Theseus on throne), Ant. Lib. 33 (received by Demophon).
- 3 Eur. *Heraclidae* 134–287.
- 4 Ibid. 403–9 (maiden of noble birth to be sacrificed), 474ff. (Macaria offers herself; it should be mentioned, however, that she is not directly named in the text); Paus. 1.32.5 (child of Heracles to offer self, spring of Macaria at Marathon); Zenob. 2.61 (Macaria in proverbial phrase).
- 5 Eur. *Heraclidae* 799ff. (messenger reports, including, 844–64, Iolaos and capture of Eurystheus), 928ff. (Alcmene and killing of Eurystheus).
- 6 Pi. *Pyth.* 9.79–81.
- 7 Schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 9.137.
- 8 E.g. Apollod. Epit. 2.8.1.
- 9 Apollod. 2.8.1.
- 10 D.S. 5.57.6.
- 11 Str. 8.6.19.
- 12 Hdt. 9.26, cf. D.S. 4.58.1–5 (Heraclids must withdraw for fifty years).
- 13 Apollod. 2.8.2 (the text is slightly defective since there is a short gap and it is erroneously stated that the sons of ‘Cleolaos’, i.e. Cleodaios, rather than of Aristodemus consulted the Delphic oracle after the death of Aristomachos); to be supplemented by Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 5.20.
- 14 It was claimed that Naupactos had been given that name because Temenos had ‘built ships’ (*naus ēpexato*) there, Apollod. 2.8.2, cf. Paus. 10.38.5, Str. 9.4.7.
- 15 Apollod. 2.8.3, Paus. 3.13.4 (indicates that this is an aetiological legend explaining the origin of the cult of Apollo Carneios), Conon 26.1.
- 16 Apollod. 2.8.3, Paus. 5.3.5–6 (driving one-eyed mule, specifies crossing-point), Str. 8.3.33.
- 17 Apollod. 2.8.3 (Teisamenos killed), Paus. 7.1.3 (Teisamenos escaped north).
- 18 Paus. 5.3.6, Str. 8.3.33 (= Ephorus 70F115); for the story of how he seized the city of Elis, and his rule there, see Paus. 5.4.1–4, 6.23.8, Polyae. *Strateg.* 5.48.
- 19 Apollod. 2.8.3, two latter versions, Paus. 3.1.6. For names of Medon and Strophios, Paus. 2.16.5.
- 20 Apollod. 2.8.4, Polyae. *Strateg.* 1.6 (clearer account).
- 21 Paus. 4.3.4–5.
- 22 Hdt. 4.147, Paus. 3.1.7.
- 23 Hdt. 6.52.
- 24 Paus. 3.16.6.
- 25 Hdt. 6.52.
- 26 Apollod. 2.8.5; Hymnethos’ tomb in Argos, Paus. 2.23.3.
- 27 Paus. 2.19.1 (Ceisos becomes king), 2.26.2 (Deiphontes in Eidauros; see also 2.28.3 for the story of the death of Hymnetho at Epidaurus).
- 28 Paus. 2.19.2.
- 29 Apollod. 2.8.5, Paus. 4.3.7–8.
- 30 Paus. 4.3.6–8, 8.5.7.
- 31 Paus. 4.3.8.
- 32 Hyg. *Fab.* 137 for probable plot; Eur. fr. 449–59 Nauck.
- 33 Hom. *Il.* 2.653–70.
- 34 Pi. *Ol.* 7.27–38.
- 35 Schol. *Il.* 2.662, Apollod. 2.8.2 respectively.
- 36 Apollod. 2.8.2, D.S. 4.58.4–7 respectively. Diodorus states unhelpfully that Tlepolemos killed Lykymnios ‘in a quarrel over certain matters’; on this, see also schol. Pi. *Ol.* 7.49a, 54.
- 37 Paus. 2.4.3–4, cf. Conon 26.2 (here Aletes drove out the Sisypheid kings).
- 38 Paus. 2.6.4. The rise to power of Phalces, Aletes and Oxylos is noted by Ephorus 70F18b (from Str. 8.8.5) along with other dynastic changes associated with return of the Heraclids.
- 39 Hyg. *Fab.* 219.
- 40 Hdt. 8.137–8 (a good story); D.S. 7.15 and 17.
- 41 Hdt. 4.147.

- 42 Hdt. 4.142–50, Paus. 3.1.5–8, 4.3.4.
- 43 A.R.4.1747–54.
- 44 Hdt. 4.145–59, Pi. *Pyth.* 4.4–65, schol. A.R. 4.1764.
- 45 See e.g. Paus. 2.18.6–7.
- 46 Hellanic. 4F125, Harpocrates s.v. Apatouria.
- 47 Conon 29.
- 48 Paus. 2.18.7.
- 49 Conon 26, cf. Hellanic 4F125 (similar except that Aletes is not named), Pl.*Symp.* 208d (brief allusion), Paus. 1.19.6 (location of incident).
- 50 Paus. 7.2.1–2; Neleus as founder of twelve cities of Ionia, first Hellanic. 4F48, 125.
- 51 Paus 7.2.3.
- 52 Paus. 7.2.2.

Minos, Theseus and the myths of Crete

After having traced the history of the Argive branch of the great Inachid family, which was descended from the Argive river-god Inachos, we must now pass on to a second main branch of it, the royal family of Crete. As was explained at the beginning of [Chapter 10](#), Io, a close descendant of Inachos, wandered far away from her native Argos to settle in Egypt, and three major ruling lines, those of Argos, Crete, and Thebes, were founded (or in the case of Argos, continued) by descendants of Io who were born in Egypt or Phoenicia (see p. 215ff). The Cretan branch was descended from Europa, a descendant of Io in the fourth generation, who was abducted to the island by Zeus from Phoenicia, the land of her birth.

The mythical history of Crete during the time of its greatest king, Minos, the eldest son of Zeus and Europa, was closely interwoven with that of Athens during the time of Theseus and his father Aigeus, as anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with the myth of the Minotaur will be aware. An exile from Athens, Daidalos, helped Minos' wife to conceive the monster and built the labyrinth as a home for it; by sailing against Athens during the reign of Aigeus, Minos forced the Athenians to send a regular tribute of young people as food for it; and the young Theseus eventually killed it with the aid of advice from Daidalos, setting in course the train of events that would lead to the death of Minos himself. In view of this connection, it will be convenient to consider the mythology of Minos in conjunction with that of the young Theseus, during the period before he became king of Athens. We will return to Theseus in the next chapter to follow his adventures as king after tracing the further history of the Cretan royal family, which is a relatively short history compared to that of the Argive and Theban branches of the Inachid family, because Minos had only two successors before the accession of his grandson Idomoneus, who was ruling at the time of the Trojan War.

Minos, the Minotaur, and the young Theseus

Europa is abducted to Crete by Zeus and bears Minos and other children to him

As was described in [Chapter 10](#) (see pp. 215ff.), Libye, a granddaughter of Io, the Argive princess who had wandered away to Egypt, bore twin sons to Poseidon

named **Belos** and **Agenor**, who were destined to become the ancestors of the three afore-mentioned Inachid royal lines; for **Danaos**, a son of Belos, returned to his ancestral homeland of Argos with his many daughters and took up the throne there, in succession to rulers from another branch of the family (see p. 217), while the sons of Agenor, who became king of Phoenicia, dispersed to other parts of the world after his daughter **Europa** was abducted by Zeus, and this led to the founding of two further Inachid ruling lines in Crete and Thebes, for reasons that must now be explained.

To pick up the story of AGENOR where we left off in [Chapter 10](#) (see p. 216), he left Egypt to settle in Phoenicia on the easternmost shores of the Mediterranean, where he founded a kingdom of his own and married a certain Telephassa, or Argiope, daughter of the Nile, who bore him a daughter, EUROPA, and various sons, including Cadmos, Phoinix, and Cilix.¹ Europa grew up to be so beautiful that she attracted the love of Zeus, who assumed the form of a bull to carry her across the sea to Crete. Mystified by her sudden disappearance, Agenor ordered his sons to set off in search of her, telling them not to return under any circumstances until they had found her. They all failed in their search, however, and were therefore obliged to settle elsewhere. By bearing Minos to her divine abductor in Crete, Europa became the founder of the Inachid ruling line there, while her brother Cadmos founded the great city of Thebes in Central Greece and the royal family that ruled there (see pp. 331ff.). It should be mentioned that Europa is sometimes described as a child of Phoinix rather than of Agenor, as is Cadmos too, but this makes no practical difference to their story, see further on p. 332.

In the earliest surviving account of Europa's abduction, as ascribed to Hesiod (i.e. the author of the *Catalogue*) and Bacchylides, Zeus fell in love with her when he saw her gathering flowers with her attendant maidens in a meadow in Phoenicia, and turned himself into a bull to carry her away. After beguiling her by breathing a crocus from his mouth, he took her on to his back and carried her through the sea to Crete, where he reverted to his proper form and took her as his mistress.² Later authors have nothing essential to add, even if they are able to provide a variety of picturesque details. According to the Hellenistic poet Moschus, who supplies the most elaborate account, the bull was yellow with a circle of white on its forehead, and it emitted a divine fragrance that drowned out the scent of the flower-strewn meadow; and after winning Europa's confidence by its gentle and flirtatious behaviour, and its melodious lowing, it knelt down to entice her on to its back. Or, in the broadly similar account by Ovid, it was as white as untrodden snow. Some authors followed the early Argive mythographer Acusilaus in regarding it as an ordinary bull that was sent by Zeus or the gods; in that case, the Cretan bull that was later captured by Heracles could be identified with it (see p. 248).³

Zeus fathered three important sons by Europa in her new homeland, Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Sarpedon. He gave her some marvellous gifts, a necklace from the workshop of Hephaistos (sometimes identified with the necklace of Harmonia, see p. 333), a huge man of bronze called Talos, who guarded the coasts of the island until he was killed by Medeia (see p. 410), and an infallible hunting dog and hunting-spear (which were later taken to Attica by Procris, see p. 325).⁴ When the

time came for him to take leave of her, he arranged for her to marry ASTERIOS (or Asterion), king of Crete, who adopted her divinely begotten sons and fathered no further children by her.⁵

Minos, Pasiphae, and the origin of the Minotaur

Minos succeeded to the throne after the death of Asterios, who is little more than a name, and drove his younger brother Sarpedon into exile, either to secure the succession, or as the result of a quarrel over the love of a boy (see further on p. 300). He married PASIPHAË, a daughter of the sun-god Helios, who bore him four sons, Catreus, Deucalion, Androgeos, and Glaucos, and several daughters, including Ariadne and Phaidra, who would both play important parts in the story of Theseus.⁶ He also fathered various illegitimate children, however, and aroused such anger in Pasiphae by his many infidelities that she finally put a spell on him, causing him to ejaculate snakes, scorpions, and millipedes whenever he slept with any other woman; but he was finally cured of this strange and inconvenient affliction by yet another mistress, the Athenian heroine Procris (see further on p. 325).⁷ For the story of his unsuccessful pursuit of the nymph Britomartis, see p. 153.

In his capacity as a ruler, Minos was noted for two things above all, his wisdom as a law-maker and his power as the founder of a great maritime empire. Thucydides refers to him as the first person to be recorded as having established a navy, saying that he used it to extend his power over the Aegean, and Aristotle remarks similarly that he acquired empire over the sea, subduing some of the Aegean islands and colonizing others.⁸ The parallel that was thus drawn between his supposed empire and that of Periclean Athens became a recurring theme in the subsequent literature. He was also regarded as a wise law-maker who framed the Cretan constitution, which was highly esteemed in antiquity. In this field of activity, he was said to have benefited from the advice of his divine father, visiting him at his sacred cave on Mt Ida every nine years to consult him on his lawmaking.⁹ As already mentioned, he was so famed for his justice on earth that he was chosen to become one of the judges of the dead during his posthumous life in Hades (see p. 109). There was also a dissenting tradition, however, especially fostered at Athens (a land oppressed by him in myth as we will see), that represented him as having been a brutal tyrant. His name has been associated with the distinctive 'Minoan' civilization of Crete ever since that name was attached to it by its discoverer Sir Arthur Evans, but it is safer on the whole to put this out of one's mind when considering his myths.

Most of the main legends of Minos were connected in one way or another with the MINOTAUR, and it was in connection with that monster that his story becomes intertwined with that of Theseus. The Minotaur came to be born to his wife Pasiphae in the following circumstances. To demonstrate to the Cretans that his claim to the throne was approved by the gods, Minos prayed to Poseidon to send a bull up from the sea, promising to sacrifice it to him on its arrival; but he was so impressed by its beauty when it appeared that he mixed it into his own herds, substituting another at the sacrifice. Or, in a rather different version, he used to sacrifice the finest bull that was born in his herds each year as an offering to Poseidon, but when a beast of

wholly exceptional beauty was born one year, he kept it for himself and sacrificed another instead. In either case, Poseidon was so angry when the proper bull was not sacrificed to him that he turned it wild and caused Pasiphae to conceive an unnatural passion for it.¹⁰ Since DAIDALOS, the finest of all craftsmen, happened to be in Crete at the time, Pasiphae confided her secret to him, and he enabled her to gratify her desire by constructing a wooden cow with an ox-hide covering, and telling her to crouch down inside it in the presence of the bull. As the product of her intercourse with the bull, she gave birth to a monster with the head and tail of a bull and the body of a man.¹¹ It was usually known as the Minotaur (*Minotauros*, i.e. bull of Minos), although some mythographers report that it was properly named Asterios or Asterion after Minos' adoptive father.¹² At the request of Minos, Daidalos constructed a huge covered maze, the Labyrinth, to serve as its home and prison (see Figure 13.1).¹³



Figure 13.1. Pasiphae nurses the infant Minotaur. Interior of an Etruscan canteen. 340–320 BC. Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Daidalos was an Athenian who had fled from his native city because he had murdered his nephew. For he had taken his nephew Talos (or Calos, or Perdix) into his house as an apprentice, but had grown increasingly jealous when the youth proved to be so ingenious that he threatened to overshadow his master. For Talos proceeded to invent all kinds of wonderful devices including the potter's wheel and an instrument for inscribing circles; and when the sight of a snake's jawbone with its neat row of jagged teeth (or else the sight of the backbone of a fish), inspired him to invent the first saw, this ultimate feat overstrained the jealousy of Daidalos, who murdered him by hurling him down from the Acropolis. When his corpse was discovered on the ground below, Daidalos was arraigned for murder at the court of the Areiopagos (see p. 320), and fled to Crete to escape the inevitable penalty.¹⁴ He himself was supposed to have been the inventor of statues. With regard to the ancient wooden cultic images that came to be attributed to him, Pausanias remarked that they had a clumsy appearance but were imbued with a sense of the divine.¹⁵ For what it is worth, the mythographers contrived a royal pedigree for him by fitting him into the royal family as a grandson or great-grandson of Erechtheus, king of Athens, through his father Eupalamos (Handyman) or Metion.¹⁶

Minos attacks Megara and Athens, and forces the Athenians to send consignments of young people as food for the Minotaur

The Minotaur needed to be fed on human flesh, and as a result of an incident in which a son of Minos was killed in Attica, the king was able to ensure that the Athenians would send a regular supply of food for the monster by way of compensation. As one of the finest athletes of the age, ANDROGEOS, son of Minos, travelled to Athens to compete in the Panathenaic Games, only to meet his death there in circumstances that are variously described. It was commonly agreed that he aroused resentment by winning the victory in every event, and in one version his jealous rivals killed him as a consequence, by ambushing him as he was travelling to Thebes to compete in the funeral games for Laios;¹⁷ but in another version Aigeus, the king of Athens, contrived his death for reasons of state, sending him to confront the ferocious bull of Marathon (see p. 294) because he feared that he was conspiring with some enemies of his, the sons of Pallas (see pp. 306ff.).¹⁸ Minos made immediate preparations for war against Athens as soon as he heard of his son's fate. It so happened that the news was brought to him as he was offering a sacrifice to the Charites (Graces) on Paros; and since he stopped the flute music, and threw the garland from his head, but went on to complete the sacrifice, such sacrifices were performed on the island without flutes or garlands ever afterwards.¹⁹

Before launching his main attack against Athens, Minos laid siege to neighbouring Megara. The city had close connections with Athens at that time because it was under the rule of NISOS, son of Pandion, a brother of the king of Athens (see p. 327); and some sources claim that Minos had special cause for hostility because Megarian athletes had joined together with Athenians to murder his son.²⁰ Nisos proved to be a troublesome opponent because he had a purple hair (or lock of hair) on his head, which rendered him invulnerable (or guaranteed the safety

of his city) as long as it remained in place; but the problem was resolved when his daughter SCYLLA fell in love with Minos after catching sight of him from the ramparts, and pulled the magical hair from her father's head while he was asleep.²¹ Or, according to Aeschylus, Minos bribed her to take this action by offering her necklaces of Cretan gold.²² If she had hoped to win the love of Minos by helping him to capture the city, she was soon undeceived, for he was so appalled by her unfilial act of treachery that he tied her to the stern of his ship and dragged her through the sea until she drowned; or else he ordered that she should be thrown from his ship, and she was washed ashore on Cape Scyllaia in the Argolid.²³

Scylla was often said to have been transformed into a mythical bird, the *kiris*. According to the Hellenistic poet Parthenius, she was turned into this mysterious creature while she was being dragged through the sea behind Minos' ship,²⁴ and subsequent accounts often add that she was harried in her new life by her father after he too was transformed into a bird, a fierce sea-eagle in his case.²⁵ In Ovid's version, in which Minos simply abandoned her, she leapt into the sea as he left and clung to his departing ship, but let go in terror when she saw her father hovering above her in eagle-form, and was then transformed in her turn.²⁶ A long and elaborate narrative, which combines material from different versions, may be found in the pseudo-Vergilian *Ciris*. Hyginus departs from the usual pattern by stating that Scylla was transformed into a fish called the *ciris*, which is attacked with great savagery by the sea-eagle;²⁷ since there is mention in Greek literature of such a fish,²⁸ this may well be a genuine variant (as opposed to an error, as is common enough with this author). For another tale in which a girl came to a bad end after removing a magical hair from her father's head, see p. 326.

Athens was able to offer more effective resistance, and the war dragged on until Minos eventually lost patience and prayed to his father Zeus for assistance, prompting him to afflict the Athenians with a famine and a plague. After attempting to free themselves from their troubles by means of human sacrifices, the Athenians consulted the Delphic oracle, which advised them to compensate Minos by offering him whatever reparation he might demand. As the terms of the resulting settlement, Minos ordered that they should send seven youths and seven maidens to Crete every nine years (or every year) to serve as food for the Minotaur, for as long as the monster should live.²⁹

This tribute continued to be sent until Theseus, the son and successor of Aigeus, was sent as one of the youths in the tribute and killed the Minotaur in its lair. Before following the story to its conclusion and considering how the triumph of Theseus became the indirect cause of the death of Minos, we must examine the origins and earlier life of this greatest of Athenian heroes.

The birth of Theseus and his adventures on the road to Athens

Although AIGEUS, king of Athens, married twice over after ascending to the throne, taking Meta, daughter of Hoples, as his first wife, and Chalcioppe, daughter of Rhexenor, as his second, he failed to father any children by either marriage and came to feel increasingly vulnerable without an heir to support and succeed him.

When he consulted the Delphic oracle about the matter, he received an enigmatic response advising him 'not to untie the mouth of the wineskin until he arrived at the heights of Athens'. In terms of some fairly obvious symbolism, this meant that he should not have intercourse with any woman until he reached his wife in Athens, evidently because this would result in the conception of a son. Aigeus was mystified, however, and travelled out of his way during his return journey to seek the advice of PITTHEUS, son of Pelops, the king of Troizen, who was renowned for his wisdom. Although Pittheus recognized the meaning of the oracle at once, he kept it to himself because he wanted to ensure that his daughter AITHRA would bear the child to Aigeus (for the first and perhaps only son of the king of Athens would surely be destined for a glorious future). So he plied his guest with wine at a banquet on the evening of his arrival, and then introduced Aithra into his bed. When Aigeus woke up on the following morning and realized what he had done, he told Aithra that she should bring up their son if she should bear one, but keep his origin a secret. He then placed a sword and some sandals under a large rock nearby, and instructed Aithra to take their son to the rock when he grew up, saying that if he were able to roll it aside, he should recover the hidden objects and take them to Athens as tokens of his identity.³⁰

Although this was the most commonly accepted account of the birth of Theseus, there was also a tradition, already to be found in Bacchylides, that claimed that he was a son of the god Poseidon. This idea may well have originated Troizen, where Poseidon was highly honoured as patron god of the city. According to a local legend recorded by Pausanias, Athena sent a dream to Aithra to tell her to cross over to Sphairia, a little island just off the coast, to pour a libation to Sphairos (a former chariot-driver of Pelops who was buried there), and when she did so, Poseidon caught her by surprise and had intercourse with her, causing her to conceive Theseus. As a result of this incident, she founded a shrine on the island to Athene Apatouria (Deceitful Athene) and changed the name of the island to Hieria (Holy Island).³¹ Some mythographers tried to reconcile the two conflicting traditions by suggesting that Aithra slept with Aigeus and Poseidon on the same night.³²

Aithra duly gave birth to a son who was brought up at the Troizenian court under the name of THESEUS. Only a single story is recorded of his childhood in Troizen. Heracles called in one day and left his lion-skin on the ground while he was dining with Pittheus; and when Theseus (who was now seven) and his young friends caught sight of the skin, they all ran away in terror with the sole exception of Theseus, who seized an axe and attacked it in the belief that it was a living lion.³³ When he came of age, he rolled the rock aside with ease to recover his father's tokens, and made preparations for his journey to Athens. Since Troizen lay on the eastern coast of the Argolid, facing Athens from the opposite side of the Saronic Gulf, he could either travel by a direct sea-route or else follow the coastal path that led northwards round to the Isthmus of Corinth. He opted for the longer land-route, in the face of every warning, because it provided more prospect for adventure.³⁴ His expectations were more than fulfilled, since he was confronted on the way by a number of villains and a very dangerous pig, and was thus able to establish his heroic credentials by performing a series of six exploits.³⁵

The earliest literary reference to this cycle of heroic deeds, which provided a rather pale counterpart to the labours of Heracles, is to be found in an ode of Bacchylides dating from the first half of the fifth century BC, which lists all of the deeds described below except for the first, the slaying of the Club-man Periphetes.³⁶ The cycle was regularly portrayed on Attic vases and the artistic evidence indicates that it must have been familiar (without the Club-man as yet) by the final decade of the sixth century, after it had presumably been established in an epic poem composed in the latter part of that century.

- (i) On reaching Epidaurus, further up the east coast of the Argolid peninsula, Theseus was confronted by **Periphetes**, otherwise known as Corynetes (the Club-man), who used to cudgel passing strangers to death with a club made of iron or bronze. According to Apollodorus, he also used the club to help himself along because he was weak on his feet, but there is no sign of that in vase-paintings; the idea may have been suggested by the fact that he was often described as a son of the lame Hephaistos. When assaulted by this brute, Theseus wrested the club from his grip and killed him with it. Although the ancient mythographers say that he then adopted the club for his own use, it was not really a special attribute of his in the same way as the club of Heracles.³⁷ Since Euripides already mentions that Theseus used a club from Epidaurus, it would seem likely that he knew of the episode, and the visual record confirms that the story was probably in circulation by the fifth century BC.³⁸
 - (ii) When Theseus arrived at the Isthmus of Corinth, he was confronted by **Sinis**, otherwise known as Pityocampetes (the Pine-bender), a brutal son of Poseidon (or of Polypemon) who employed pine trees in the way that his name would suggest. For he would bend two pine trees to the ground, fasten one arm of his victim to each, and then let go of them to cause the unfortunate man to be torn apart as the trees sprung upwards;³⁹ or in another version of the story, he would force his victim to help him to bend a single pine tree to the ground, and then suddenly let go of it, causing the man to be tossed up into the air and killed.⁴⁰ Theseus turned his own scheme against him, causing him to be killed in the same way as he had previously killed others. Although his daughter Perigune ran away and tried to hide among some rushes and wild asparagus, Theseus enticed her out and seduced her, causing her to conceive a son Melanippos (a minor Attic hero who had a shrine at Athens).⁴¹
 - (iii) While proceeding up the Isthmus, Theseus killed the **sow of Crommyon**, a ferocious wild pig, which had long been a menace to travellers. Some said that it was a true monster, as a child of Typhon and Echidna. According to Apollodorus, it was named Phaia (the Grey) after the old woman who had reared it.⁴² In vase-paintings, Theseus is usually shown confronting the beast with his sword while the old woman (named only once, as Kromyo) urges it forwards with her outstretched arm or arms.
 - (iv) At the Sceironian Cliffs in Megara, the province that adjoins Attica to the west, Theseus encountered **Sceiron**, a villain who forced passing travellers to wash his feet, and then kicked them over the cliffs while they were doing so, sending them flying into the sea below to fall prey to a giant turtle. Theseus bent down as though in obedience to his command, but seized him by his feet and hurled him likewise into the sea, where he was devoured by the turtle.⁴³
- The Megarians refused to accept that Sceiron had been a rogue of such a kind. According to the local tradition, as recorded by Pausanias, he was of royal descent as a great-grandson of the primordial king Lelex, and he married the daughter of Pandion (an exiled king of Athens who came to rule at Megara, see p. 327). After the death of Pandion, he quarrelled over the succession with Nisos, a son of the dead king, and the matter was referred for arbitration to Aiacos (the righteous king of Aegina, see p. 426), who decided that Nisos should become king of Megara while Sceiron became its military commander (polemarch).⁴⁴ While acting in that function, Sceiron not only suppressed brigandage but constructed the main thoroughfare

- through the Isthmus, the Sceironian Way, which led through the rough countryside to the south-west of the city of Megara; Herodotus remarks that when the Greeks set out to fortify the Isthmus against the Persians, the first action that they undertook was to block this path.⁴⁵ The Megarians claimed that the wife of Aiacos, who was called Endeis, was a daughter of Sceiron (rather than of Cheiron as in the original tradition), and argued that the pious Aiacos would hardly have agreed to the marriage if Sceiron had really been such a villain as the other Greeks pretended. Although they were willing to accept that he had been killed by Theseus, they claimed that he had met his death in honourable circumstances when Theseus, as king of Athens, was seizing Eleusis from the Megarians who then controlled it.⁴⁶
- (v) While passing through Attica, Theseus was confronted by **Cercyon**, king of Eleusis, a son of Poseidon (or Hephaistos, or Branchos), who used to force passing strangers to wrestle with him and killed them in the course of the fight. But the young hero caused him to die instead by raising him up into the air and dashing him to the ground. Cercyon's wrestling ground could be seen in historical times beside the road that led from Megara to Eleusis. As this story might suggest, Theseus was reputed to have been a very fine wrestler, or even the man who had first established wrestling as an art rather than as a mere exercise in brute strength.⁴⁷
- (vi) And finally, at Erineos, no great distance from Athens, Theseus encountered the villain who is still commemorated in proverb for his 'Procrustean bed'. The Greeks knew him variously as **Procrustes** (Hammerer), Damastes, and Polypemon. He owned a house by the roadside, which contained two special beds, one short and the other long, and he used to lure travellers to their destruction by inviting them to enjoy his hospitality; for if they were short, he would demonstrate his idea of hospitality by laying them on the long bed and hammering out their legs until they came to fit it, or if they were tall, by laying them on the short bed and cutting off the parts of their body that projected beyond it. Or, in another version of the story, he had a single bed and would adapt his visitors to fit it by pruning their bodies or hammering them out as the occasion demanded.⁴⁸ Theseus meted out the very same treatment to him and then reached Athens without further incident.

Theseus is acknowledged as heir to the Athenian throne, and sets off for Crete with the tribute

Now that Theseus had arrived safely in Athens, it should have been easy for him to prove his identity to his father by showing him the tokens that he had brought, and so come to be acknowledged as his son and heir; but he was faced with an unexpected problem because Jason's former wife, Medeia, a woman of strong and ruthless character, had married Aigeus in the meantime (see p. 413) and had borne him a son, Medos, and she now set to work to plot the death of Theseus to protect her own interests and ensure that her own son would succeed to the throne. She attempted to achieve her aim in two ways, by contriving that he should be sent out against the fierce bull of Marathon, and that he should be poisoned at a banquet. Realizing who he was, before he was able to prove his identity to his father, she persuaded Aigeus that the newly arrived stranger was conspiring to seize the throne, and the king responded by sending him to confront the bull, in the belief that he would surely be killed by it. This savage beast, which was causing havoc in the countryside around Marathon in north-eastern Attica, was often identified with the Cretan bull that had been sent mad by Poseidon in his anger against Minos (see p. 289), and had later been brought to the mainland by Heracles as one of his labours (see pp. 248–9).

Theseus set off without delay to confront the bull at its usual haunts and subjected it to his will; for it would seem that he did not kill it on the spot in the earliest version of the story, but subdued it to bring it back to Athens. Black-figure vase-paintings regularly show him wrestling with it to subjugate it, or as already having achieved that aim, and it is mentioned in a fragment from Sophocles' *Aigeus* that he tied it up with willow branches. Later sources report accordingly that he brought it to Athens, where he and the king sacrificed it to Apollo. In the later tradition, however, he is sometimes said to have killed it immediately.⁴⁹

There is a further story of some interest associated with this episode. While travelling across Attica to confront the bull, Theseus was caught by a storm and was granted shelter and hospitality by an old woman called HECALÉ, who lived in the deme (parish) of that name between Athens and Marathon. As he set off on the following morning, she vowed to offer a sacrifice to Zeus if he returned safely from his encounter with the bull. When he arrived back afterwards, however, he discovered to his sorrow that she had died in the meantime, and acknowledged her kindness by founding the local festival of Zeus Hecaleios. Hecale, as the eponym of the deme of that name, was addressed and honoured as Hecaline, supposedly because Theseus had addressed her by that pet name during his stay. This aetiological legend was recounted at some length by Callimachus in a miniature epic, the *Hecale*, now preserved only in fragmentary form.⁵⁰

When Theseus returned unharmed from this adventure, Medeia tried to redeem the situation by mixing a poisoned draught, for she was expert in such matters, and then arranging for Aigeus to offer it to him as a drink. But before drinking it, Theseus presented his sword to his father, who recognized it as the one that he had left behind at Troizen and immediately knocked the cup out of his hands. Medeia's scheme was thus exposed, and Theseus was publicly acknowledged by his father and recognized as the legitimate heir to the throne.⁵¹

There was also another version of this story in which Medeia persuaded Aigeus to invite Theseus to a banquet immediately after his arrival, and to serve the poisoned drink to him at that point; but Theseus indicated his identity to his father by drawing his sword when the meat was served, as though to carve it, and Aigeus duly recognized it and knocked the cup of wine from his hand. Medeia's designs were thus exposed at an early stage in this account, and Theseus set out against the bull at a later time on his own initiative, to win public favour by ridding the land of it.⁵²

Not long after Theseus came to be acknowledged as the son of Aigeus, the time arrived for the third tribute of youths and maidens to be sent to Crete as food for the Minotaur, and Theseus volunteered to be included in it in the hope that he would be able to kill the monster and so relieve Athens from the tribute.⁵³ Or else, he was simply chosen by lot along with the other young people, or in yet another version, Minos used to sail to Athens to pick out the victims himself and selected Theseus as his first choice on the present occasion.⁵⁴ In the usual story in which the tribute was conveyed in an Athenian vessel, the ship was fitted with black sails because it was being sent on this gloomy mission, and Aigeus told Theseus that he should raise white sails as a sign of his safe return if he should come back unscathed.⁵⁵

A memorable story is recounted by the poet Bacchylides in connection with

Theseus' voyage to Crete; it presupposes that Minos sailed to Athens to collect the tribute, and that Theseus was a son of Poseidon as the local tradition at Troizen suggested (see p. 292). When Minos, who was noted for his amorous disposition, took a fancy to one of the girls in the tribute (a certain Eriboia) and began to caress her cheeks, Theseus ordered him to desist; and to justify this intervention against a son of Zeus, he proclaimed that he too was of semi-divine origin as a son of Poseidon, the great god of the seas. After first praying to Zeus to send a lightning-bolt as proof of his own birth, Minos removed a golden ring from his finger and hurled it into the sea, challenging Theseus to fetch it back again if he was really a son of Poseidon. So Theseus jumped from the stern of the ship, trusting in his father to ensure his safety. Some dolphins swam up to him and carried him down to his father's palace in the depths of the sea, where Amphitrite, the consort of Poseidon, presented him with a purple robe and a golden crown that she had received from Aphrodite on the day of her wedding (and presumably also ensured that he gained possession of the ring of Minos, even though this is not explicitly stated by Bacchylides).⁵⁶ Or, in another account, Thetis gave him a crown while the Nereids brought him the ring.⁵⁷ Poseidon can be seen receiving him in person in some Attic vase-paintings. When he rose up from the sea with the divine gifts and the ring, Minos was put to shame and the young Athenians rejoiced.

Theseus kills the Minotaur with help from Ariadne, but abandons her during the return voyage

After his arrival in Crete, Theseus received invaluable assistance from one of the king's daughters, ARIADNE, who fell in love with him and did her best to ensure that he should survive. We will begin by following the earliest full account, as ascribed to the early mythographer Pherecydes, who showed a special interest in Theseus as an Athenian author. Ariadne gave Theseus a ball of string, so we are told, which she had acquired from Daidalos, the builder of the labyrinth, and told him to tie the end of it to the door as he entered, and then unwind it until he reached the innermost part of the maze; and if he caught the Minotaur asleep there, he should seize him by the hairs of his head and sacrifice him to Poseidon, and then make his way out of the labyrinth by winding the thread back again. He duly killed the Minotaur, presumably with his sword, escaped from the labyrinth, and embarked on the ship on which he had come, along with Ariadne and the youths and maidens from the tribute whom he had saved in this way. Before leaving he took the precaution of knocking holes in the bottoms of the Cretan ships to prevent them from being able to make a quick pursuit.⁵⁸ This remained the standard account in the later tradition, in which Theseus was usually stated to have killed the Minotaur with a sword, although vase-painters gave freer rein to their imagination and also showed him attacking the monster with a spear, club or stone, or even with his bare fists. According to Apollodorus, Ariadne made Theseus swear to take her as his wife as a condition for offering him her help, and then sought the advice of Daidalos as to how he could escape from the labyrinth (see [Figure 13.2](#)).⁵⁹



Figure 13.2. Theseus and the Minotaur. Drawing.

There was also another version of the story, recorded in the astronomical literature, in which Theseus lit his way through the labyrinth with a wondrous crown that he had received from Ariadne. For Dionysos had previously visited Crete with the intention of seducing her, and had given her this marvellous crown, which had been made by Hephaistos with gold and Indian jewels, and it shone in the dark, enabling Theseus to lighten the gloom of the labyrinth (and presumably escape without any need for the thread). In the usual tradition, as we will see, Ariadne first met Dionysos after leaving Crete with Theseus, and he gave her the crown at that later time when he took her as his wife. He was said to have placed it in the heavens after her death in any case, to become the constellation of the Northern Crown (Corona Borealis).⁶⁰

During the voyage north, Theseus called in at the island of Naxos (or Dia), where he abandoned Ariadne. An early tradition suggested that he did so deliberately because he was in love with another woman, namely Aigle, a daughter of the Phocian hero Panopeus;⁶¹ but it was commonly agreed in the later tradition that he was obliged to leave Ariadne behind because Dionysos wanted her as his wife. Athena appeared to him for that reason while he was asleep on the shore and ordered him to sail home without Ariadne; or else Hermes ordered him to do so;⁶² or Dionysos simply carried the girl away while he was lying asleep.⁶³ She met with a happy fate in any case since Dionysos not only made her his consort but also proved

to be a devoted and more or less faithful husband (see p. 171). The *Odyssey* offers an exceptional version of Ariadne's story in which Artemis shot her on Dia in response to evidence laid against her by Dionysos;⁶⁴ the story that lay behind this brief and surprising report seems to have been forgotten at an early period (see [Figure 13.3](#)).



Figure 13.3. Theseus and Ariadne. Lekythos depicting Theseus and Ariadne being woken up by Athena, 460 BC red-figure pottery, Italy. Ancient Greek civilization, Magna Graecia, fifth century BC. © ak-g-images/De Agostini Picture Lib./G. Dagli Orti.

After calling in at Delos, where the youths from the tribute first performed the crane-dance, a serpentine dance that imitated the windings of the labyrinth,⁶⁵ Theseus and his companions finally arrived within sight of Attica. In the exultation of the moment or because he was still grieving over the loss of Ariadne, Theseus forgot to raise white sails on the ship to show his father that he was safe; and when Aigeus saw the black sails from his vantage point on the Acropolis or Cape Sounion at the southern tip of Attica, he hurled himself down to his death. Some claimed that the Aegean Sea was named after him because he threw himself into it on this

occasion. After landing at Phaleron, the old harbour of Athens, Theseus became aware of the tragic consequence of his oversight and ascended to the city in mourning rather than in triumph, as the new king of Athens.⁶⁶ We will consider the course of his reign in the next chapter, after first completing our survey of Cretan myth.

The flight of Daidalos and Icaros, and death of Minos

On discovering that Daidalos had helped Theseus to escape through the advice that he had offered to Ariadne, Minos ordered that he should be arrested and imprisoned in the labyrinth along with his son ICAROS, who had been borne to him by a slave-girl in the palace. Or, in another account, Minos took this action after discovering (rather belatedly it would seem) that Daidalos had enabled Pasiphae to conceive the Minotaur by building the wooden cow for her. Daidalos was far too clever to submit to incarceration without devising a means of escape, and set to work to make pairs of wings for himself and his son, constructing them from birds' feathers and wax. Before flying off, he warned his son not to soar too high, since the wax would then be melted by the sun, nor to descend too low, since the wings would then be damaged by moisture from the sea; but Icaros was so exhilarated by the flight that he soared higher and higher until his wings eventually melted and he plunged to his death in the sea below. He fell into the south-eastern region of the Aegean that was known as the Icarian Sea ever afterwards. Heracles, who was serving Omphale in Asia Minor at the time, found his body on an island off the coast and buried him there, naming the island Icaria in his memory. Or else, his father saw to his burial. Daidalos flew with greater prudence and made his way safely to Sicily, where he was offered refuge by Cocalos, the king of Camicos in the west of the island.⁶⁷

Although it is altogether unlikely that Daidalos would have flown all the way to Sicily in the original story, no accounts have survived from before the Hellenistic period, and this had become the accepted tradition by that time. Herodotus already mentions that Minos went to Sicily in search of Daidalos, and met a violent death there.⁶⁸ Minos travelled far and wide, so Apollodorus recounts, and produced a spiral seashell wherever he went, and promised a handsome reward to anyone who could draw a thread through it; for he was convinced that no one other than Daidalos had the ingenuity to perform such a delicate feat. When he eventually arrived at Camicos and made his usual challenge, Cocalos took the shell from him and secretly gave it to Daidalos, who was wisely keeping out of sight; and Daidalos achieved the feat just as Minos had supposed he would, by boring a small hole at the top of the shell, attaching a thread to an ant, and causing the ant to crawl through the shell until it emerged at the mouth. On receiving the shell with the thread drawn through it, Minos realized that Daidalos was somewhere close by, and demanded that he should be surrendered to him. Cocalos assured him that this would be done and invited him to enjoy his hospitality in the meantime; but while Minos was taking his bath, the king's daughters caused his death by pouring boiling water over him. The challenge with the seashell seems to have been a fairly ancient detail, since it was apparently mentioned in a lost play by Sophocles.⁶⁹ Diodorus offers a

rationalized account in which Minos discovered beforehand that Daidalos had fled to Sicily, and there is no mention of the seashell.⁷⁰ It was sometimes said that Daidalos arranged the murder of Minos by fitting a special pipe into the ceiling above the bath, or that Minos was killed with molten pitch rather than boiling water.⁷¹

The family of Minos and later kings of Crete

Sarpedon is driven out by Minos, and he and Miletos cross over to Asia Minor

After the death of Minos, the throne passed to his eldest son Catreus, but before passing on to the later mythical history of Crete, we must consider the myths of Sarpedon and Rhadamanthys, the two younger brothers of Minos. Although Zeus and Europa are said to have had two sons alone in the *Iliad*, Minos and Rhadamanthys, SARPEDON was named as a further son of theirs in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*,⁷² and this Sarpedon was identified moreover with the Sarpedon who fought at Troy, even though the Trojan War must have taken place long after the death of Minos, and the Sarpedon who fought in it was associated with Lycia in Asia Minor rather than with Crete or the Greek islands.

Lycia was of greater importance in Greek heroic legend than might be expected, partly because the Lycians, commanded by Sarpedon and his cousin Glaucos, are presented in the *Iliad* as the most significant foreign allies of the Trojans, and partly because a king of that land, Iobates, plays a central part in the legend of the great monster-slaying hero Bellerophon (see p. 221). In the *Iliad*, Sarpedon is neither a brother of Minos nor even of Cretan descent, but of mixed Greek and Lycian descent as a son whom Zeus had fathered by Laodameia, the daughter of hero Bellerophon, who had married a daughter of Iobates after performing various feats in his land.⁷³ Sarpedon's ancestry is recorded in some detail in the epic because his cousin Glaucos encounters Diomedes in battle, and the Greek warrior is so impressed by his valour that he enquires about his ancestry, prompting him to give a full account of his family history (which accords with what is indicated in Table 8).

This Homeric account of Sarpedon's origins came to be displaced in the later tradition by one that made him a son of Europa born in Crete. It is by no means clear why the author of the *Catalogue*, if he was responsible for this innovation, should have regarded such a change as desirable (although it has been suggested that it may have been introduced to provide Sarpedon with a more favourable ancestry, since Sisyphos, who was the founder of his line in the Homeric genealogy, was a notorious rogue whose descendants tended to come to a bad end). Cretans often figure in any case in foundation myths for places in Asia Minor, since they were thought to be a very ancient people and their land was appropriately situated in relation to Asia. The change raised chronological difficulties nonetheless, as already indicated, because Europa's children must have been born at least two or three generations before the Trojan War. The *Catalogue* resolved the problem by suggesting that Sarpedon's father Zeus granted him the privilege of living longer than any ordinary mortal (probably for three generations, as later reported by Apollodorus, for there is a gap at this

point in the relevant Hesiodic fragment).⁷⁴ Some later authors chose another approach, by suggesting that the Sarpedon who was born to Europa was the grandfather of the one who led the Lycians at Troy; in that case, the two conflicting genealogies could be reconciled by positing that the Cretan Sarpedon fathered a son in Lycia who married Bellerophon's daughter to become the father of the Homeric Sarpedon.⁷⁵

If the Sarpedon who fought at Troy (or his earlier namesake) was born in Crete, it has to be explained how he came to be established in Asia Minor. Although nothing is known about how the matter was treated in the *Catalogue*, a power struggle with Minos might be thought to be the most obvious cause for his departure, and Herodotus states accordingly that he fought with Minos for the Cretan throne, but was defeated and expelled along with his followers. The exiles then established themselves in the land that would come to be known as Lycia, and began to call themselves Lycians when Lycos, son of Pandion, king of Athens, arrived among them after being expelled from Attica by his brother Aigeus (see p. 327).⁷⁶

Another tale was subsequently developed in which Minos and Sarpedon were said to have quarrelled over love rather than power, when competing for the favour of a boy called MILETOS. In Apollodorus' account of this tale, Miletos was borne to Apollo by a certain Areia, daughter of Cleochos, and when he showed himself to be more friendly to Sarpedon, Minos went to war with his brother over the matter, and expelled him along with Miletos. After the two of them arrived in Asia Minor, Miletos founded the Carian city of Miletos, while Sarpedon for his part won the Lycian throne by supporting Gilix, the eponymous ruler of the Cilicians, in a war that he was fighting against the Lycians.⁷⁷

The preceding legend seems to have been of relatively late origin because the city of Miletos was not founded by a Miletos in the earliest known foundation myth, as recorded by the historian Ephorus in the fourth century BC, but rather by Sarpedon himself, after he arrived at the site with colonists from Miletos (or Milatos) in Crete, hence the name of the new city.⁷⁸ A Miletos is first named as its eponymous founder in a tale ascribed to Aristocritos, a Milesian author who probably lived a century later. His mother, who is called Areia as in Apollodorus' account, hid him in a yew tree (*milax*) after his birth, according to this tale, but he was recovered by his grandfather Cleochos, who named him Miletos after his hiding place. The report is vague about the circumstances of his subsequent exile, merely stating that he had to go abroad because he aroused the resentment of Minos (perhaps in matters of love, or because Minos suspected that he was plotting a revolt, as in a later account by Ovid). Whatever the exact cause of his departure, he went first to the island of Samos, where he founded the Samian Miletos, and then to the Asian mainland, where he founded the far more important Carian city of that name.⁷⁹

In a somewhat later version of his legend ascribed to Nicander (second century BC), Miletos becomes a member of the Cretan royal family, as a son who was borne to Apollo by Acacallis, daughter of Minos. She exposed him at birth in the woods, but he was tended by wolves at the will of Apollo and then reared by some herdsmen. When he grew up to become a handsome young man, Minos conceived a passion for him and planned to subject him to his will, but he set off by night for

Caria on the advice of Sarpedon, and founded the city of Miletos. He married a local princess, who bore him a son Caunos, who was the eponym of the Carian city of that name, and a daughter Byblis, who was associated with a Milesian spring known as the Tears of Byblis.⁸⁰

Sarpedon plays a leading role as an ally of the Trojans in some parts of the *Iliad*, killing Tlepolemos, a son of Heracles who was the leader of the men from Rhodes (see pp. 282–3), and making the first breach in the wall that the Greeks had erected to protect their ships; but he was finally killed by Achilles' friend Patroclus, as the last and greatest deed performed by that hero, and his body was then carried home to Lycia by Hypnos and Thanatos (Sleep and Death) at the will of his father Zeus.⁸¹

Rhadamanthys, the just and wise brother of Minos

RHADAMANTHYS, the other brother of Minos (or his only brother in earliest tradition), remained with him in Crete, unlike Sarpedon, for a certain length of time at least. No myths are recorded for him in early sources, although the *Odyssey* alludes to a tale in which the Phaeacians conveyed him across the sea to meet Tityos for some unexplained reason.⁸² It is clear, on the other hand, that he was famous from ancient times for his wisdom and righteousness. He was described as just in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, and Pindar presents him as exercising his wisdom in the Isles of the Blessed, a posthumous home for favoured mortals, where he assists Cronos as a counsellor.⁸³ The *Odyssey* already mentions that he was transferred to the Elysian Plain (which comes to much the same) after his death, but without saying why.⁸⁴ Plato is the first author to present him explicitly as acting as a judge in the Underworld, in accordance with what would be the standard tradition thereafter. It was assumed correspondingly that he had been a wise judge and law-maker during his earthly existence.⁸⁵ Aristotle credits him, for instance, with the invention of the principle that a person who inflicts a wrong should be repaid in exact proportion (*jus talionis*).⁸⁶

Since Minos was also regarded as having been a law-maker and paragon of justice, this created something of a problem for the mythographers, who tried to distinguish his sphere of activity from that of Rhadamanthys in various different ways. According to some accounts, Rhadamanthys had established the highly admired Cretan constitution, while Minos had ruled in accordance with its dictates; or conversely, Minos, as a wise ruler, established the laws and constitution of Crete, while his younger brother served under him as a judge and as guardian of the principles that had been laid down by him.⁸⁷ Or else, Minos ruled and legislated in Crete while Rhadamanthys performed a corresponding function in the smaller islands to the north and some coastal districts of Asia Minor; for the islanders had been so impressed by the reputation that he had acquired for justice that they had entrusted themselves to him of their own free will,⁸⁸ or else Minos had grown so jealous of his fame that he had tried to marginalize him by sending him to rule the remoter parts of his empire.⁸⁹

Rhadamanthys also had Boeotian connections, for he was said to have left Crete at some stage to marry Alcmena, the mother of Heracles, after the death of her first

husband Amphitryon, and to have lived with her at Ocaleia in the western Boeotia from that time onwards. It was sometimes claimed that he even reared the young Heracles and instructed him in archery (although the hero's putative father Amphitryon was generally said to have survived until he was an adult). Stories must have been put forwards to explain why he left his original homeland, as in the case of Sarpedon, but the surviving literature offers little help on the matter, Apollodorus simply stating that he fled to Boeotia without offering any reason. At the most, it is suggested in one source, in accordance with a standard motif, that he had to depart into exile after killing a brother of his.⁹⁰

There was an alternative tradition, probably fairly ancient since it was known to Pherecydes, in which Rhadamanthys contracted his marriage to Alcmene during his posthumous existence on the Isles of the Blessed, after she was conducted there for that purpose by Hermes at the order of Zeus. An aetiological myth, presumably of Hellenistic origin, came to be attached to this story. When Hermes was instructed by Zeus to steal Alcmene's body to take her to the Isles, he substituted a stone for her in her coffin; but while her grandsons, the sons of Heracles, were carrying the coffin away, they found it to be so heavy that they put it down and opened the lid to investigate; and on discovering the mysterious stone, they set it up in a sacred grove at Thebes near the site of Alcmene's heroic shrine.⁹¹ There must have been an unusual stone there, although nothing is recorded of it, and this would also explain why Alcmene had no grave at Thebes.⁹²

The children of Minos and Pasiphae, and the legend of Glaucos

As has been mentioned, Catreus succeeded to the throne after the death of his father Minos. By his marriage to Pasiphae, Minos had four sons, Catreus, Deucalion, Androgeos, and Glaucos, and four or five daughters.⁹³ Two of these sons never succeeded to the throne, namely **Androgeos** because he met an early death while visiting Athens as an athlete (see pp. 290–1), and **Glaucos**, because he was the youngest child. **Catreus** succeeded his father as the eldest son, to be followed by his brother **Deucalion**, after he and his only son died in quick succession in tragic circumstances. Deucalion's son and successor **Idomoneus** was on the throne when the Trojan War broke out, and led the Cretan contingent to Troy. Before tracing the history of the rulers of Crete, we must consider a remarkable story recorded for Minos' youngest son Glaucos, and the various fates of Minos' daughters.

In any normal circumstances GLAUCOS would have died during his early childhood, for he fell into a huge jar of honey while chasing a mouse (or while playing with a ball) and was drowned. Mystified by his disappearance, Minos searched for him everywhere without success, and finally summoned together the finest seers of the age to ask how the child might be found. Having been told by the Couretes (see p. 202) or Apollo that he would be found by the man who could find the best image to describe a marvellous cow in the king's possession, which changed colour every four hours (or twice a day) from white to red and then to black, Minos put this question to the seers, and Polyidos, a Corinthian descended from the great seer Melampous, provided the best answer by saying that the cow resembled a

blackberry (or mulberry), which changes colour in that sequence as it ripens. Polyidos then immediately set to work to discover the child, and seeing an owl putting birds to flight above the place Glaucos had met his accident, he recognized this as a sign and searched the cellar below until he found the child's body.

Minos was not satisfied with a mere corpse, however, and ordered that Polyidos should be shut in with the dead child until he discovered a way to bring him back to life again. When a snake happened to approach the child's body, Polyidos threw a stone at it and killed it, thinking that he would be in even worse trouble if any harm came to the body. This action proved to be his salvation, because another snake crept up to its dead companion and brought it back to life by applying a special herb to it, and Polyidos then imitated the snake by applying the herb to the body of Glaucos, causing him to be brought back to life in his turn. Before allowing the seer to sail home with his reward, Minos demanded that he should teach Glaucos to become a seer like himself. So Polyidos instructed him under force of necessity, but told him to spit into his mouth just before he sailed away, and on doing so the child forgot everything that he had learned. An alternative version in which Glaucos was restored to life by Asclepios was presumably of secondary origin. Nothing is reported of his subsequent life after he was saved from death in this way.⁹⁴

To pass on to the daughters of Minos and Pasiphae, **Ariadne** was already known as such to Homer, while Phaidra, who also figures in the body of myth in which Crete's history is intertwined with that of Athens, is first identified as a daughter of Minos in tragedy. Ariadne eloped with Theseus after he killed the Minotaur, as already described above, but was abandoned by him on the island of Naxos to become the consort of Dionysos, who finally rendered her immortal in the usual tradition. When Minos' son Deucalion came to the throne, he offered **Phaidra** to Theseus as a wife, in spite of everything that had previously transpired, apparently as a conciliatory measure; but the marriage was destined to end in tragedy when she fell in love with her stepson Hippolytos (see p. 310). Of the other daughters who came to be ascribed to Minos, **Euryale** was the mother of Orion (see p. 560), **Xenodice** is nothing more than a name, and **Acacallis** (or Acalle), a curious figure who originated as a minor goddess, was remembered in Cretan legend as a heroine who bore various eponyms and city-founders to gods, bearing Naxos for instance to Apollo, and Cydon, the eponym of the Cretan city of that name, to Hermes.⁹⁵ As was noted above, she was also described as the mother of Miletos in one version of his story, though apparently not the earliest. According to Apollonius, Minos became so angry with her after she had once become pregnant by Apollo that he drove her from the land, causing her to settle in Libya, where she gave birth to Garamas, the eponym of a Libyan people called the Garamantes, a grandson who would come into conflict with the Argonauts.⁹⁶

Catreus and his children, Idomoneus and Meriones

Minos' successor CATREUS had four children, a son Althaimenes and three daughters, Apemosyne, Aerope, and Clymene.⁹⁷ When he consulted an oracle about how his life would end, he was told that he would die at the hand of one of his

children, and although he tried to keep this disturbing prophecy secret, his son ALTHAIMENES came to hear of it and sailed away to Rhodes to ensure that there could be no danger of him ever fulfilling it. Or else, Althaimenes took this measure because he himself had been warned by an oracle that he was fated to kill his father.⁹⁸ One of his sisters, Apemosyne, accompanied him into exile. After arriving on Rhodes, he climbed Mt Atabyrion, the tallest peak on the island and looked around in every direction, surveying the surrounding islands, and on catching sight of Crete in the far distance, he began to think of his ancestral gods, and decided to raise a shrine to Zeus on this Rhodian mountain.⁹⁹ Such was the legend that was offered to explain the origin of the cult of Atabyrian Zeus, which was indeed very ancient, perhaps being ultimately of Phoenician origin.

Mere flight would not suffice to prevent the oracle from being fulfilled, and before killing his father, Althaimenes was destined to cause the death of his sister APEMOSYNE too, in the following circumstances. Hermes happened to conceive a passion for her, and on finding that he was unable to catch her, however hard he tried, because she could run so much faster than he could, he spread some freshly cut hides across her path and so caused her to slip to the ground as she was returning from a spring. He then proceeded to rape her (an uncharacteristic action for Hermes, who was normally kind if unscrupulous); and when she told her brother about these events, he refused to believe her, thinking that she was trying to conceal a liaison with a mortal lover, and kicked her so violently that she died as a consequence.¹⁰⁰

Sometime afterwards, Catreus came to feel that he was too old to exercise power in Crete, and sailed to Rhodes to recall his long-lost son. When he and his companions came ashore, however, in a remote corner of the island, the local people mistook them for pirates and pelted them with stones. Although Catreus tried to explain his intent, his words were drowned out by the barking of the dogs; and when Althaimenes arrived on the scene in response to the commotion, he killed his father with a throw of his spear without realizing who he was. On discovering afterwards that he had killed his father, just as the oracle had predicted, he prayed to the gods to be removed from the earth, and was swallowed up in a chasm; or else he simply died of a broken heart.¹⁰¹

After learning from the above-mentioned oracle that he would be killed by one of his children, Catreus had come to fear that his daughters CLYMENE and AEROPE might present a danger to him, and had thus handed them over to the seafarer Nauplios to be sold abroad. Nauplios acted more generously, however, as in the similar story of Auge (see p. 551), and offered Aerope to the king of Mycenae as a wife while taking Clymene as his own wife.¹⁰² Or, in a rather different account from a lost play by Euripides, Catreus asked Nauplios to drown Aerope at sea after discovering that she had been seduced by a slave, but Nauplios took her to the king of Mycenae instead.¹⁰³ Although there was disagreement as to whether she married Atreus or Pleisthenes (an obscure figure who was sometimes interposed into the Mycenaean king-list between Atreus and Agamemnon, see p. 423), she is always said to have been delivered to Pleisthenes in the surviving accounts of this story. She became the mother of Agamemnon and Menelaos in either case. As for Clymene, she

bore two or more sons to Nauplios, most notably the ingenious inventor Palamedes who was murdered by Odysseus at Troy (see p. 471).

After the death of Catreus, his brother DEUCALION ascended to the throne as the next eldest son of Minos. He is a colourless figure who has no stories associated with his name; at the most, he is said to have offered his sister Phaidra to Theseus as a wife (see p. 310). His son and successor IDOMONEUS, who was generally thought to have been the last descendant of Europa to rule in Crete, led a large force of Cretans to Troy in eighty ships.¹⁰⁴ He would indeed have been the first Greek ruler to know that a war against Troy was in prospect, because Menelaos was first informed of the abduction of Helen during a visit to Crete (see p. 460).¹⁰⁵ In the *Iliad* he is commended by Agamemnon as being one of the most valiant of the Greek warriors, even though he was older than most of his comrades, his hair being flecked with grey.¹⁰⁶ He was numbered among the warriors who put themselves forwards to fight in single combat with Hector, and he dominated the fighting for a time while the Greeks were under desperate pressure by their ships.¹⁰⁷ It is stated in the *Odyssey* that he returned home safely, and there is no suggestion as yet that he met with any trouble on his arrival.¹⁰⁸ It came to be suggested, however, in the later tradition that he was forced into exile and ended his life far away in Italy, see further on p. 504.

MERIONES, the Cretan who served as second-in-command to Idomoneus at Troy, was the son of a certain Molos, who was either an illegitimate son of Deucalion or a further son of Minos.¹⁰⁹ He appears quite frequently in the *Iliad* as a valiant warrior; he joins with his commander in offering to oppose Hector in single combat, fights bravely in the battle around the Greek ships, wounding Deiphobos and killing others, and helps Menelaos to recover the body of Patroclus.¹¹⁰ He is likely to be most familiar, however, as the possessor of a remarkable leather helmet, which was armoured with rows of shining boars' tusks; since helmets of this Mycenaean design would have been obsolete long before Homer's time, the relevant passage in the *Iliad* is often quoted to show how extremely ancient material could be preserved in oral epic.¹¹¹ Meriones lends the helmet to Odysseus when he sets off on his night reconnaissance in the tenth book of the poem.¹¹² Meriones is mentioned among the warriors in the Wooden Horse,¹¹³ and he apparently returned safely to Crete in the early and local tradition (even if some late sources claim that he ended up in Sicily or Paphlagonia).¹¹⁴ Diodorus reports that he shared a tomb with Idomoneus at Cnossos, and that the Cretans honoured the pair in hero-cult and used to invoke their aid in time of war.¹¹⁵ On witnessing a strange festival in Crete in which the image of a headless man was exhibited, Plutarch was told that the effigy represented Meriones' father Molos, who had been discovered without a head after he had tried to rape a nymph.¹¹⁶

Since Idomoneus was a grandson of Minos, this Cretan ruling line was extremely short, and the genealogies of this branch of the Inachid family cannot be synchronized with those of the Argive and Theban branches descended from Danaos and Cadmos, who lived at least seven generations before the Trojan War. In view of long-established traditions about his reign, it had to be assumed that Minos had lived at a relatively late period, because, among other things, he was a younger

contemporary of Theseus, whose sons belonged to the generation of those who fought in the Trojan War (see p. 316). To remove the resulting chronological inconsistencies, some mythographers tried to lengthen the Cretan line by claiming that the Minos who was a son of Europa was the grandfather of the famous Minos through a son called Lycastos (the eponym of a Cretan city of that name).¹¹⁷ Such are the problems that arise when originally unconnected bodies of myth have to be fitted into a consistent pseudo-historical pattern.

Notes

- 1 Apollod. 3.1.1; Agenor's wife as Argiope, Pher. F21, Hyg. *Fab.* 6.
- 2 Schol. *Il.* 12.92 citing Hesiod (= fr. 171) and Bacchylides (= fr. 105).
- 3 Moschus 2, Ov. *Met.* 2.836–75; genuine bull, Acus. 2F29, D.S. 5.78.1.
- 4 Children, Hes. fr. 141, Apollod. 3.1.1, D.S. 4.60.3, etc.; the necklace, Hes. fr. 141, Pher. 3F89; bronze man, A.R. 4.1643–4; dog and spear, Eratosth. 33, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.35.
- 5 E.g. Apollod. 3.1.2.
- 6 *Ibid.*; Ariadne and Deucalion mentioned as children of Minos in Hom. *Od.* 11.321–2, *Il.* 13.451.
- 7 Apollod. 3.5.1, Ant. Lib. 41.
- 8 The supposed sea-empire of Minos, e.g. Thuc. 1.4.1, Hdt. 1.171, Aristotle *Politics* 2.10 (1271b 33–40), Str. 1.3.2, D.S. 5.78.3, 84.1.
- 9 Visits to Zeus, Pl. *Laws* 624b, ps.Pl. *Minos* 319bc, D.S. 5.78.3; the idea was apparently inspired by Hom. *Od.* 19.178–9.
- 10 Apollod. 3.1.3–4 (bull sent up from sea), D.S. 4.77.2–4 (latter version); see also Hes. fr. 145 (very incomplete, but bull apparently sent up from sea and became father of Minotaur), Eur. *Cretans* frs. 81–2 Austin, Hyg. *Fab.* 40. For another account of why the bull was sent, see Paus. 1.27.9.
- 11 Apollod. 3.1.4, Palaeph. 2 (first mention of wooden cow), D.S. 4.77.1, 3, Ov. *Met.* 8.131–3, 9.736–40, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 40 (Pasiphae inspired with the aberrant desire by Aphrodite for neglecting her cult).
- 12 E.g. Apollod. 3.1.4
- 13 Apollod. 3.1.4, D.S. 4.77.4 etc.; labyrinth first mentioned as home of Minotaur, Philochorus 328F17, Call. *Hymn* 4.311.
- 14 Murder of Talos and exile, D.S. 4.76.4–7, Apollod. 3.15.8; cf. Paus. 1.21.5 (Calos as victim), Soph. fr. 323 Radt and Hyg. *Fab.* 39 (Perdix), Ov. *Met.* 8.236–59 (Perdix transformed into a partridge, *perdix*, afterwards).
- 15 Paus. 2.4.5.
- 16 Son of Metion, Pher. 3F146, D.S. 4.76.1; son of Eupalamos, Bacch. 26.5–7, Apollod. 3.15.9.
- 17 Apollod. 3.15.7.
- 18 D.S. 4.60.4–5.
- 19 Apollod. 3.15.7.
- 20 Serv. *Aen.* 6.14, schol. Stat. *Achill.* 192.
- 21 Apollod. 3.15.8, Paus. 1.19.5, Ov. *Met.* 8.6–94, Hyg. *Fab.* 198; c.f. Call. fr. 288 (allusion only).
- 22 Aesch. *Libation-Bearers* 614–22.
- 23 Apollod. 3.15.8, Paus. 2.34.7 respectively.
- 24 Schol. Dionys. *Per.* 420 citing Parthenius.
- 25 Indicated Dionys. Av. 2.15, Verg. *Georg.* 1.406–9; full treatment ps.Verg. *Ciris*.
- 26 Ov. *Met.* 8.95–151.
- 27 Hyg. *Fab.* 198, Serv. *Aen.* 6.286.
- 28 Opp. *Hal.* 1.129, 3.187.
- 29 Apollod. 3.15.8, cf. D.S. 4.61.1–3, Plut. *Thes.* 15.
- 30 Apollod. 3.15.6–7, Plut. *Thes.* 3; cf. Eur. *Med.* 663–86, *Suppl.* 1–7.
- 31 Paus. 2.33.1.
- 32 Apollod. 3.15.6–7, Hyg. *Fab.* 37.
- 33 Paus. 1.27.8; on childhood of Theseus, see also Plut. *Thes.* 4–5.
- 34 Plut. *Thes.* 6; Paus. 2.32.7 ('Theseus' Rock' near Hermione).
- 35 For the cycle as a whole, see Apollod. 3.15.6–7, Epit. 1.1–4, D.S. 4.59.2–5, Plut. *Thes.* 8–11, Ov. *Met.* 7.435–47 (brief summary), Hyg. *Fab.* 38.

- 36 Bacch. 18.16–30.
- 37 For this and each of the following exploits, see the sources cited in n. 35.
- 38 Eur. *Suppl.* 714–15.
- 39 This version in D.S. 4.59.3, Paus. 2.1.4.
- 40 E.g. Apollod. 3.16.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 38.
- 41 Plut. *Thes.* 8, Paus. 10.25.2.
- 42 Bacch. 18.23–4, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.1, Plut. *Thes.* 9.
- 43 Apollod. *Epit.* 1–23, Plut. *Thes.* 10.1, D.S. 4.59.4.
- 44 Paus. 1.39.5.
- 45 Construction of road, Paus. 1.44.10; blocked during Persian War, Hdt. 8.71.
- 46 Plut. *Thes.* 10.
- 47 Paus. 1.39.3.
- 48 For this less common account, D.S. 4.59.5, schol. Eur. *Hippol.* 977.
- 49 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.5–6, D.S. 4.59.6, Soph. fr. 25 Radt.
- 50 Plut. *Thes.* 14 (following Philochorus = 328F109), Call. *Hekale* frr.
- 51 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.6.
- 52 Plut. *Thes.* 12, Ov. *Met.* 7.404–24; cf. Call. fr. 232–3.
- 53 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.7, Plut. *Thes.* 17, Hyg. *Fab.* 41.
- 54 By lot, Pher. 3F148; Minos comes, Hellenic. 4F164 (cited as variant by Plut. l.c.).
- 55 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.7–8, Plut. *Thes.* 17, D.S. 4.61.4; scarlet sails to be raised as signal, Simon. 550.
- 56 Bacch. 17, cf. Paus. 1.17.3.
- 57 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.5.
- 58 Pher. 3F148; cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 1.8–9, D.S. 4.61.4 (brief), Hyg. *Fab.* 42 (again brief and uninformative), schol. *Il.* 18.590; sabotaged Cretan ships, Pher. 3F150 (from Plut. *Thes.* 19; the story was so famous that Plutarch felt no need to offer any further details).
- 59 Apollod. l.c. Theseu is here described as killing the monster with his bare fists.
- 60 Eratosth. 5, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.5.
- 61 Hes. fr. 147, 298; cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 43 (abandons her because he fears disapproval if he brings her to Athens).
- 62 E.g. Pher. 3F148, Serv. *Georg.* 1.222 respectively.
- 63 D.S. 4.61.5, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.9; for other variants, see Plut. *Thes.* 20.
- 64 Hom. *Od.* 11.321–5.
- 65 Plut. *Thes.* 21.
- 66 Ibid. 22 (fullest), D.S. 4.61.6–7, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.10, Paus. 1.22.5; hence the name of the Aegean Sea, Hyg. *Fab.* 43, Serv. *Aen.* 3.74.
- 67 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.12–13, Str. 14.1.19, D.S. 4.77.5–9 (with rationalized alternative), Paus. 9.11.3 (rationalized), Ov. *Met.* 8.183–235, Hyg. *Fab.* 40.
- 68 Hdt. 7.170.
- 69 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.14–15, Zenob. 4.92 (pitch); Hdt. 7.170 (Minos died in Sicily while seeking Daidalos), Soph. *Kamikoï*, fr. 324 Radt (mention of shell).
- 70 D.S. 4.79.1–3
- 71 Schol. Pi. *Nem.* 4.95a.
- 72 Hom. *Il.* 14.321–2, Hes. fr. 141.
- 73 Hom. *Il.* 6.191–9.
- 74 Hes. fr. 141.20–1, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.1.2.
- 75 D.S. 5.79.3.
- 76 Hdt. 1.172.
- 77 Apollod. 3.1.2.
- 78 Ephoros 70F127 (= Str. 14.1.6).
- 79 Aritokritos 493F3; for Ovid's account, see *Met.* 9.442–8.
- 80 Ant. Lib. 30.
- 81 Hom. *Il.* 16.419–507; conveyed to Lycia by Sleep and Death, *ibid.* 666–83.
- 82 Hom. *Od.* 7.321–4.
- 83 Hes. fr. 141, Pi. *Ol.* 2.74–7.
- 84 Ibid. 4.563–4, Pi. *Ol.* 2.75, *Pyth.* 2.73.
- 85 Pl. *Apol.* 41a, Gorg. 523e, D.S. 5.79.2, etc.
- 86 Aristotle *Nic. Eth.* 5.5 (1132b25).
- 87 Plut. *Thes.* 16, cf. Pl. *Laws* 624a–625b, ps.Pl. *Minos* 318d, 320bc.

- 88 D.S. 5.79.1; cf. Apollod. 3.1.2 (Rhadamanthys laid down laws for the islanders).
- 89 D.S. 5.84.2–3.
- 90 Apollod. 2.4.11, 3.1.2; schol. Lyc. 50 (left Crete after killing brother).
- 91 Ant. Lib. 33 (citing Pherecydes = 3F84).
- 92 Paus. 9.16.4.
- 93 Apollod. 3.1.2.
- 94 Apollod. 3.2.1–2, with Hyg. *Fab.* 136 (explains nature of wondrous cow and mentions omen of owl and bees); cf. Aesch. fr. 116 Radt (cow), Palaeph. 26 (story of snakes). This was the subject of Aeschylus' *Kressai*, Sophocles' *Manteis*, and Euripides' *Polyidos*.
- 95 Schol. A.R. 4.1492; mother of Miletos, Ant. Lib. 30.
- 96 A.R. 4.1485–97.
- 97 Apollod. 3.2.1.
- 98 Former version, Apollod. 3.2.1; latter, D.S. 5.59.1–2.
- 99 Apollod. 3.2.1, D.S. 5.59.2.
- 100 Ibid. 3.2.1.
- 101 Ibid. 3.2.2, D.S. 5.59.3–4.
- 102 Apollod. 3.2.2.
- 103 Schol. Soph. *Ajax* 1297 citing Eur. *Kressai*.
- 104 Hom. *Il.* 2.645–52.
- 105 Proclus on *Cypria*, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.3.
- 106 Commended by Agamemnon, Hom. *Il.* 4.256–64, grey hairs, 13.361–2.
- 107 Hom. *Il.* 7.165, 13.361ff.
- 108 Hom. *Od.* 3.191–2.
- 109 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.10, schol. Lyc. 1093; variant, schol. Lyc. 1223.
- 110 Serv. *Aen.* 3.121, 12.320, Vat. Myth. 1.195, 2.210.
- 111 Verg. *Aen.* 3.400–1.
- 112 Son of Molos, Hom. *Il.* 10.269–70; Molos brother of Deucalion, D.S. 5.79.4, illegitimate son of Deucalion, Apollod. 3.3.1.
- 113 See Hom. *Il.* 7.165–6, 13 passim, 17.715ff.
- 114 Hom. *Il.* 10.261–71.
- 115 Q.S. 12.720.
- 116 Grave in Crete, D.S. 5.79.4; see also ps.Aristotle *Peplos* 15. Sicily, Plut. *Marc.* 20, Paphlagonia, Steph. Byz. s.v. Kressa.
- 117 D.S. 4.60.3, Steph. Byz. s.v. Lykastos.

14

The kings of Athens

The reign and adventures of Theseus

Theseus becomes king of Athens, quells a revolt, and abducts an Amazon, provoking an Amazon invasion

We must now return to Theseus, to consider his further career after he became king of Athens. He ascended to the throne immediately after his return from Crete as a result of the suicide of his father, and proceeded to institute many political reforms. Or, so it came to be increasingly claimed, for his older mythology has to be distinguished from the mass of pseudo-historical material, mostly of Hellenistic origin, that came to be attached to the story of his reign. It was thus claimed, for instance, that he achieved the unification ('synoecism', *synoikismos*) of Attica by uniting the various independent communities of the land (twelve in number according to tradition) into a single state ruled from Athens.¹ This seems to have been a relatively early example of his legends of this kind, since Thucydides already describes how he was supposed to have abolished the councils and magistracies of the individual settlements to create a single assembly and seat of government in the capital city.² In reality, of course, the unification of Athens would have been achieved by a gradual process. Since Athens was noted in classical times for its large population of resident aliens or 'metics' (*meroikoi*), who made an invaluable contribution to the economic and cultural life of the city, this feature of the state was also attributed to the foresight of Theseus, who was said to have laid the ground for it by first encouraging the settlement of resident foreigners. To commemorate these two notable innovations, he founded the annual festivals of the Synoicia and Metoicia. He was also supposed to have introduced the first Athenian coinage, the coins being stamped with the image of an ox rather than of an owl as in later times. A convenient, though by no means complete, account of his innovations and reforms (even extending to the introduction of a form of democracy!) can be found in Plutarch's life of Theseus.³

To return to the heroic mythology of Theseus, he was faced with a revolt at some point from PALLAS, son of Pandion, a younger brother of Aigeus, and his fifty sons, the Pallantidai. Pandion had long resented the fact that Aigeus had taken the Athenian throne for himself after recovering it with the help of his brothers (see p.

327); and it is also reported that he alleged that Aigeus (and thus Theseus too) had no rightful claim in any case because he had merely been an adopted son of Pandion, his true father having been a certain Scyrios (presumably the eponym of the island of Scyros, where Theseus was supposed to have owned ancestral properties, see p. 315).⁴ Although this legend of the revolt of Pallas, which is first mentioned in Euripides' *Hippolytos*, may have been quite ancient, we have to rely on Hellenistic and later sources for our knowledge of it. These disagree about the timing of the revolt, differing as to whether Pallas launched it at this present period, soon after Theseus ascended to the throne, or else when he had first arrived at Athens, or later after he married Phaidra (as Euripides indicates in stating that she accompanied him to Troizen when he went there to be purified after killing the Pallantidai).⁵ In the fullest account by Plutarch, based on early Hellenistic sources, Pallas divided his force, marching openly against Athens from Sphettos with one part of it, while the other part lay hidden at Gargettos on the other side of the city so as to be able to launch a surprise attack from the rear; but a herald called Leos betrayed the plan to Theseus, who was thus able to slaughter the hidden troops in a surprise attack of his own. On hearing of their fate, the other contingent scattered and the revolt petered out.⁶ This is a rationalized account in which the revolt is presented as an ordinary historical episode. It is suggested elsewhere that Pallas and his many sons were killed by Theseus in person.

As his first foreign adventure after his rise to power, Theseus sailed to the land of the Amazons in the north-eastern corner of Asia Minor and abducted an Amazon, usually named as ANTIOPE but sometimes as Hippolyte or Melanippe, to Athens to make her his wife or concubine.⁷ Some authors explain that he came to travel to that part of the world because he accompanied Heracles when that hero went to fetch the belt of the Amazon queen Hippolyte as one of his labours (see p. 250). In that case, Antiope was awarded to him by Heracles as a prize of honour because of the valour that he showed in that enterprise;⁸ or else she fell in love with him while Heracles was vainly attempting to seize the Amazon city of Themiscyra, and betrayed the city to him so as to be able to join him.⁹ In most accounts, however, Theseus mounted an expedition of his own to the area for reasons that are left unexplained. This was apparently the original tradition, followed by the early mythographers Pherecydes and Hellanicus, and this version could also be regarded as preferable on chronological grounds. Pindar remarks that Theseus was accompanied by his friend Peirithoos (see p. 311), who is also shown among his allies on Attic vase-paintings, and Pherecydes is reported to have written that Theseus seized the Amazon with the help of his charioteer Phorbas.¹⁰ He can be seen taking her to his chariot, or carrying her off in it, in vase-paintings from the latter part of the sixth century BC onwards. Plutarch cites a version in which the Amazons showed themselves as being more friendly than they were usually thought to have been, only to be tricked by Theseus when they sent gifts to him; for when an Amazon arrived with them, he invited her on to his ship and then promptly put out to sea with her on board.¹¹ He brought an Amazon back to Athens with him in any case, where she seems to have lived quite happily with him, bearing him a son, Hippolytos.

The Amazons were greatly angered by the abduction of their sister-Amazon, as

was natural, and ventured into Greece for the first time in their history to exact vengeance against Theseus. According to Hellanicus, they travelled by way of the northern shores of the Black Sea, crossing over the Cimmerian Bosphoros (i.e. the Straits of Azov, between Asia and the Crimea) while it was frozen over in winter.¹² On arriving at Athens, they set up camp at a place known as the Amazeion, which was apparently situated on the slopes of the Areiopagos; according to Aeschylus, the Areiopagos (Hill of Ares, see p. 320) first came to be known as such because they offered sacrifices to their main god Ares on it during their stay.¹³ Antiope had no wish to be taken home in the usual tradition, and joined battle at Theseus' side until she was killed by an Amazon called Molpadia. When the warrior-women were finally defeated, the survivors fled to neighbouring Megara and beyond, hence (so it was claimed) the Amazon graves that could be seen in various parts of Greece. Plutarch's life of Theseus provides a detailed account of the battle, and also refers to accounts in which Theseus' wife arranged a peace treaty, after the war had dragged on for three months, or secretly arranged for the wounded Amazons to be nursed at Chalcis in Euboea. The tomb of Antiope could be seen at Athens in historical times, as could that of the Amazon who had killed her.¹⁴

The tragedy of Phaidra and Hippolytos

It was convenient that Antiope should be removed from the scene since Theseus was said to have married the Cretan princess PHAIDRA at some point, either as his second wife or as his only legitimate wife if the Amazon had merely been his concubine.¹⁵ There was also an account, however, apparently originating in early epic, in which Antiope was still alive at the time of the wedding; for Plutarch cites the author of the *Theseis* as stating that she and some fellow Amazons attacked Theseus after the marriage but were killed by Heracles.¹⁶ Apollodorus records a similar story in which the previous wife of Theseus and some other Amazons tried to break into the wedding-feast fully armed with the intention of killing the guests; but Theseus' men managed to close the doors, and she was intercepted and killed outside.¹⁷ Phaidra was offered to Theseus by her brother Deucalion, who was now king of Crete, apparently as a diplomatic measure to ease the bad relations that had prevailed between Crete and Athens since the murder of Androgeos. Theseus fathered two sons by her, Acamas and Demophon, and adopted them as his heirs, sending his previous son Hippolytos away to his grandfather Pittheus in Troizen.¹⁸

Since Pittheus had no sons of his own, HIPPOLYTOS could have expected to succeed him as king of Troizen, but he was destined to meet an early death instead as a result of the machinations of his stepmother. For Phaidra conceived a desperate passion for him, and was so mortified when he rejected her that she made false allegations against him, telling Theseus that he had tried to rape or seduce her. Taking her at her word, Theseus cursed him to Poseidon, who sent a bull from the sea to frighten his horses as he was driving his chariot along the shore at Troizen, causing him to be thrown out and killed. On hearing of his fate, Phaidra was overcome by remorse and hanged herself.¹⁹ Such was the original version of the story, so far as we can tell; but Phaidra is portrayed more sympathetically in

Euripides' surviving *Hippolytos* (his second play on the theme).

In this play, Hippolytos is presented as a chaste and austere huntsman who is an ardent devotee of the virgin goddess Artemis. In his single-mindedness, he has, by contrast, scorned the cult and works of Aphrodite as the goddess of love, provoking her to create trouble for him by causing his stepmother to fall helplessly in love with him. Although Phaidra is ashamed of her semi-incestuous passion and struggles against it in secret, even trying to find a release in death by refusing her food, her practically minded nurse worms the secret out of her, and then approaches Hippolytos on her behalf without her knowledge. The young Hippolytos, who is portrayed as an unimaginative and self-righteous young man, is thoroughly shocked and responds with a long rant about the vileness of women in general and of Phaidra in particular; and when Phaidra hears of this, she fears that Hippolytos will denounce her and takes her own life, leaving a note accusing him of rape (partly out of anger, and partly to ensure that her reputation and the prospects of her sons will be salvaged). On reading the letter, Theseus curses Hippolytos to his father Poseidon (who had previously promised him the fulfilment of three curses), and scornfully brushes aside his son's protestations of innocence. Poseidon causes Hippolytos to be fatally injured at Troizen in the manner described above, and his fellow hunters carry him home to his father in the final scene of the play; having learned the truth from Artemis just before, when the situation was already past mending, Theseus begs his son's forgiveness and is reconciled with him before he expires.²⁰

Hippolytos was accorded divine honours at Troizen at a shrine supposedly founded by Diomedes. The maidens of the city would visit it before their marriage to dedicate a lock of their hair to him, a practice foretold by Artemis at the end of Euripides' *Hippolytos*.²¹ When Pausanias visited the area, he found that the Troizenians refused to acknowledge the usual story of his death (officially at least) or show his grave, claiming that he had been raised to the heavens to become the constellation of the Charioteer (Auriga).²² The traditional account of his death was firmly established nonetheless in the local folklore, for his burial mound could be seen there, as could the old twisted olive tree on which his reins had become entangled before he was thrown from his chariot.²³ Visitors were shown a myrtle tree, moreover, which grew with perforated leaves because Phaidra used to mutilate them in frustration while spying on Hippolytos as he was taking exercise nearby.²⁴

An early tradition, which can be traced back to the *Naupactia*, a lost epic composed in the sixth century BC or thereabouts, suggested that Asclepios restored Hippolytos to life again after his unfortunate death, presumably because he considered that his death had been undeserved.²⁵ The story of his revival prompted the development of a curious Italian appendix to his legend, in which he was said to have been transferred to Latium to become a cultic associate of Diana, an Italian goddess who was identified with Artemis. Diana's most notable cultic centre was her sacred grove at Aricia, which was located beneath the Alban Mount, about seventeen miles south-east of Rome. The grove lay in a wooded hollow by a still lake, the Lacus Nemorensis (Lake of Nemi), also known by the more poetic name of Diana's Mirror, and the goddess shared it with two lesser deities, the spring-nymph Egeria and an obscure minor god of aged appearance called VIRBIUS. Now it was a rule of the

grove that horses were strictly excluded from it, and to explain the origin of that rule and of Virbius himself, the following supplement was added to the legend of Hippolytos. After he was revived by Asclepios (with the help of the healing-god Paian in this account from Ovid) Diana/Artemis enshrouded him in a deep mist because she knew that the lord of the Underworld disapproved of the revival of mortals. To ensure his future safety, she then transformed his appearance to make him look older, conferred a new name on him (which would have been desirable in any case since his old one would have reminded him of horses, *hippoi*), and spirited him away to her grove at Aricia to live there under her protection as a minor god. Since he had been dragged to his death by horses, he wanted to have nothing more to do with them and they were banned from the grove from that time onwards; and it could be explained that he was now called Virbius because he had been 'a man twice over' (a Latin etymology, *vir bis*!).²⁶

Theseus and his friend Peirithoos, and the war between the Lapiths and the Centaurs

On many of his later adventures, including his expedition to the land of the Amazons in some accounts, Theseus was accompanied by his friend PEIRITHOOS, son of Ixion. Plutarch provides a rather facile story to explain how the pair came to form their partnership. To test whether Theseus was really as strong and brave as his reputation suggested, Peirithoos drove some of his cattle away from the plain of Marathon in northern Attica and turned to confront him when he arrived in pursuit. When they came within sight of one another, each was so impressed by the courage and bearing of the other that they refrained from fighting, and Peirithoos reached his hand out to Theseus and declared that he was ready to submit to any penalty that he proposed; but Theseus asked to become his friend instead, and they spent much of their time together from that moment onwards.²⁷

Peirithoos was a Lapith chieftain of northern Thessaly. The LAPITHS (Lapithai) were a warlike people of that northern land who were best remembered for their conflict with the CENTAURS, a struggle in which Theseus was often said to have become involved as a result of his friendship with Peirithoos. Thessaly was the original homeland of the Centaurs, and quite apart from being neighbours of the Lapiths, they could also be said to have been related to them, because they had been brought into being by a son whom Ixion, the father of Peirithoos, had fathered in the following remarkable circumstances. As has been described in connection with Ixion's punishment in the Underworld, he tried to seduce Hera when invited to live among the gods, and Zeus set a trap for him by fashioning a cloud-image of Hera (see further on p. 107). Ixion duly proceeded to mate with the cloud-Hera, causing it to conceive a child, Centauros, who later brought the uncouth race of Centaurs (Centauroi) into being by mating with wild mares on Mt Pelion.²⁸ The Centaurs were not only as brutal and impious as their grandfather Ixion, but were half-animal besides, being part man and part horse. They were pictured either as a complete man with the chest and hindquarters of a horse springing from his back, or else as a horse with the upper body of a man springing from where its equine head would otherwise

be, the former representation being the more ancient. Female Centaurs were a later invention, for as in the case of other semi-animal nature-spirits, such as Satyrs and Tritons, it was traditionally imagined that they had nymphs as their wives and daughters.

Ixion fathered Peirithoos in more conventional circumstances, as a child who was borne to him by his wife Dia, daughter of Deioneus; or according to the *Iliad*, Ixion's wife (here unnamed) really bore him to Zeus.²⁹ Peirithoos, for his part, married a certain HIPPODAMEIA, who is variously described as a daughter of Boutes, Adrastos, or Atrax.³⁰ In addition to the most eminent Thessalians and his Athenian friend, he also invited the Centaurs to the wedding-feast, as was only proper because they were neighbours and also relations. They drank far too much wine, however, in accordance with their unbridled nature, and tried to molest the female guests or even tried to rape the bride when she was brought into the hall. Their outrageous behaviour provoked a furious struggle in which Peirithoos and the Lapiths subdued them with the help of Theseus.³¹ Although this was the end of the matter in one version of the story, it was commonly believed that the Centaurs gathered their forces after this initial confrontation, and engaged in a full-scale war with the Lapiths until they were defeated and expelled from Thessaly. In that case, Theseus continued to fight in support of the Lapiths; or in a rather different account in which he had not attended the wedding, he now travelled to Thessaly for the specific purpose of helping the Lapiths in the war after it had commenced.³² The Centaurs were generally supposed to have used pine trees as weapons while their opponents wore armour and fought with spears. After being defeated, the Centaurs had to seek a new home and settled in Arcadia, another wild mountainous region, where they lived until they were foolish enough to provoke a conflict with Heracles (see p. 246).

The legend of the conflict between the Lapiths and the Centaurs was a very ancient story, which was known to Homer. The aged Nestor remarks in the *Iliad* that the mightiest warriors whom he had ever seen, or ever expected to see, were Peirithoos, Dryas, Caineus, Exadios, and Polyphemos (all Lapiths) and their ally Theseus, who had fought and destroyed the mighty beasts (*phēres*) of the mountains;³³ and the *Odyssey* reveals something about the origin of the hostilities, if the same episode is envisaged, as seems likely. For it reports that the Centaur Eurytion once became drunk in the halls of Peirithoos, and seriously misbehaved in some unspecified way, provoking the Lapiths to drag him outside and cut off his ears and nostrils, hence the origin of the feud that arose between the Centaurs and the human race.³⁴ There is no indication here that the offence was committed at a wedding. The *Iliad* reports further that Hippodameia conceived Polypoites, the son and heir of Peirithoos (or gave birth to him, the Greek is ambiguous) on the day on which Peirithoos exacted revenge on the 'shaggy beasts' and drove them away from Pelion.³⁵ Together with another Lapith chieftain, Leonteus, Polypoites later became the joint leader of the Lapith contingent at Troy.³⁶

Only one specific story of any real note is recorded in connection with the war between the Lapiths and the Centaurs, that of the death of CAINEUS, who is already mentioned by Homer as one of the mighty warriors who fought in the conflict. A child of the Lapith chieftain Elatos, he was originally born as a girl called Cainis, but

came to be transformed into a man in the following circumstances. When still quite young, Cainis was raped by Poseidon, who then tried to offer some sort of reparation by allowing her to choose whatever she most desired; and to ensure that she could never be subjected to such treatment again, she asked to be transformed into a man, and into an invulnerable man moreover. This was an ancient tale that was recounted in some form in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*.³⁷ Caineus, as he now came to be known, rose to power as a local chieftain, but soon became brutal and impious in the arrogance of his power. For he refused to offer prayer and sacrifice to the gods, but paid honour to his spear instead; or else he fixed it into the ground in the marketplace of his city and ordered his people to honour it as a god.³⁸ Zeus was so appalled by his presumption that he caused him to be killed by the Centaurs during their war against the Lapiths (or apparently as a separate episode in another version). Since he was invulnerable and could thus suffer no harm from spears, swords, and other piercing weapons, it might be thought that the Centaurs were not faced with the easiest of tasks, but they managed to kill him by hammering him into the ground with tree-trunks or boulders (or both), which were in any case their normal weapons (see [Figure 14.1](#)). It is added by Ovid, probably through his own invention, that Caineus now underwent a second transformation, for a bird with golden wings flew up into the air at the place where he had been buried beneath the earth. Since the bird is of the appropriate colour and is described moreover as being the only one of its kind, it would seem that we are meant to think that he was turned into the phoenix.³⁹



Figure 14.1. Caineus battered into the ground by Centaurs. Bronze relief from Olympia, c. 650 BC. Archaeological Museum, Olympia, Greece.

Theseus and Peirithoos abduct Helen from Sparta, and try to abduct Persephone from the Underworld

After helping to defeat the Centaurs, Theseus and Peirithoos went off together at some point to take part in the hunt for the Calydonian boar and (in some accounts) the voyage of the Argonauts;⁴⁰ but their most remarkable enterprise was the final one in which they set out to abduct two daughters of Zeus, including the queen of the Underworld, as their brides after their previous wives had died. There seems to have been nothing unusual about the circumstances of Hippodameia's death, by contrast to that of Phaidra. She apparently bore only a single child to her husband, the afore-mentioned Polypoites.

Theseus and Peirithoos began by seizing Helen from Sparta. This was a very ancient legend, which must have been known to Homer in some form, since it is mentioned in the *Iliad* that Theseus' mother Aithra (who was taken to Sparta when Helen was recovered from Attica, see below) was present at Troy as a servant of Helen.⁴¹ The early lyric poets, Alcman and Stesichorus, are reported furthermore to have written about the episode.⁴² Although Helen was presumably of marriageable age in the original version, this would have come to seem implausible when rational and consistent chronologies were developed for this period of mythical history, and mythographers from Hellanicus onwards suggest accordingly that she was still a young girl aged seven, or ten, or twelve or the like.⁴³ In Diodorus' account of the story, Peirithoos visited Theseus after the death of Hippodameia, and proposed the abduction after learning that his friend too had lost his wife; and after seizing Helen, who was only ten but already surpassed all other women in beauty, they cast lots for her on the agreement that the one who gained her would help his friend to gain whatever bride he chose, whatever peril that might entail. So, when Peirithoos lost and declared that he wanted to seize Persephone from the Underworld, Theseus was obliged to assist him. Plutarch offers a similar version, reporting that the pair captured Helen as she was dancing in the temple of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, and were pursued as far as Tegea in southern Arcadia.⁴⁴ In a curious version recorded by Hyginus, Zeus was so impressed by the daring that they showed in abducting her that he wanted Peirithoos to have his daughter Persephone as a wife, and recommended to them in a dream that they should ask Hades to grant her to him.⁴⁵ Or else, the two heroes both agreed together from the beginning that they ought to marry daughters of Zeus, since Peirithoos was a son of Zeus and Theseus a son of the great god, Poseidon, and Theseus chose Helen as his prospective bride while Peirithoos chose Persephone.⁴⁶

Before setting off for the Underworld, Theseus took Helen to Aphidnai in north-eastern Attica and entrusted her to the care of Aphidnos, the eponymous ruler of the town, telling him to keep her there under the strictest secrecy; and he summoned his mother Aithra from Troizen to act as her companion.⁴⁷ He and Peirithoos then descended to the Underworld by the most favoured route, the bottomless cave at Tainaron at the southern tip of the Peloponnese, and somehow persuaded the infernal ferryman Charon to convey them across the boundary-river to the dismal realm of the dead. Two surviving lines from the early epic account offered in a poem called the *Minyas* indicate that his boat was not at its moorings when they arrived at the river, and it would seem that they had to wait by the river-bank for a while until he came back.⁴⁸ They apparently approached the lord of the Underworld quite

openly to ask him to release Persephone, rather than attempting to abduct her by stealth, but very little is recorded of this aspect of the adventure in surviving sources. Another fragment from early epic gives an impression of the sort of reasoning that they might have employed, stating that Peirithoos believed that he had a better claim to Persephone because he was a child of Zeus like herself, while Hades was merely her uncle!⁴⁹ It was crazy, of course, to suppose that Hades would surrender his wife to a mortal on this or any other ground, and he proceeded to imprison them in his underground kingdom. According to Apollodorus, he made a show of friendliness, inviting the two of them to sit down as if they were about to enjoy his hospitality; but when they did so, they found that their flesh became attached to the seat, the 'Chair of Forgetfulness' (*thronos Lēthēs*), and that they were also held fast by coils of snakes.⁵⁰ The former idea seems to have been of quite respectable antiquity, since Panyasis, an epic poet of the fifth century BC, is reported to have written that Theseus and Peirithoos did not look like prisoners, but were held fast all the same because body and rock had grown together. In other accounts and depictions, however, they were held prisoner all too plainly, being bound down by snakes and chains.⁵¹

Although both were probably detained forever in the original story, it came to be believed that Heracles released one or both of them when he descended to the Underworld to fetch Cerberos (as his penultimate or final labour, see p. 254). In the usual account, the great hero was able to pull Theseus up from his seat, but not Peirithoos because he bore the greater guilt as the one who had proposed the abduction of Persephone. In Apollodorus' narrative, the earth shook in warning accordingly when Heracles extended his hand to Peirithoos.⁵² There are conflicting accounts too, however, in which Peirithoos was rescued along with Theseus or neither the one nor the other was released.⁵³

The exile and death of Theseus

While Theseus was far away in the world below, Helen's brothers (or half-brothers) the Dioscuri came to Attica to recover her, and proceeded to ravage the land when the Athenians told them that they did not have her and did not know where she was. In the end, however, the secret of her hiding place leaked out or was betrayed to them. Two main stories were put forwards to explain how this came about. According to Herodotus, the Dioscuri terrorized the people of Attica by destroying their villages until the men of Decaleia, or else Decalos himself (the eponym of the town), agreed to guide them to Helen's hiding-place at Aphidnai; and the Spartans granted special privileges to the Decaleians ever afterwards for that reason, and left their town unharmed whenever they invaded Attica.⁵⁴ They used this town in north-central Attica as a forwards base when they attacked Athens during the Peloponnesian War. Or, according to the other story, the secret was betrayed by Academos, the eponym of the Academy (Acadameia), a sacred grove on the outskirts of Athens, which is best remembered as the site of Plato's school.⁵⁵ The Disocuri soon captured Aphidnai in any case to rescue their sister, and they also seized Theseus' mother Aithra and took her back to Sparta to serve Helen as a maid. Before

leaving, they exacted revenge on Theseus by installing MENESTHEUS, son of Peteos, on the throne in place of him, or by helping him to seize power.⁵⁶ As a member of a junior branch of the Athenian royal family, Menestheus could claim to rule with at least some measure of legitimacy.

So when Theseus arrived back from the Underworld, he found that this new ruler was firmly in control, and that his sons Acamas and Demophon had fled into exile, to take refuge with Elephenor, king of the Abantes, on the island of Euboea.⁵⁷ Theseus was thus obliged to look for a new home, and sailed away to the small island of Scyros, to the east of Euboea, where he owned ancestral estates; or else he arrived on Scyros by accident, when he was blown off course while trying to reach the court of his father-in-law Deucalion in Crete.⁵⁸ Although Lycomedes, the king of Scyros, pretended to be glad to receive him, he set to work to contrive his death, because he feared that his own position would be weakened if such a great hero were to settle there, or else because he wanted to perform a favour for Menestheus. He achieved his end by taking Theseus up to the highest point on the island, on the pretext of showing him his estates, and then pushing him over a cliff. Or, in a more banal account, which absolves Lycomedes of any blame, Theseus simply slipped and fell while taking an after-dinner walk. His season of glory had passed in any case; Plutarch remarks that his death attracted little attention at the time.⁵⁹

If this marked the end of the earthly life of Theseus, he was supposed to have assisted the Athenians posthumously at the battle of Marathon, marching ahead of them in full armour as they advanced against the Persians.⁶⁰ After the Persian Wars, the Delphic oracle ordered that his bones should be fetched home to Athens; and when Cimon, a prominent Athenian statesman and general, captured Scyros in 475 BC, he thus made every effort to locate the hero's burial place. When he noticed one day that an eagle had landed on what appeared to be a burial mound, and was pecking at it with its beak and tearing at it with its talons, he concluded that this must be a sign and ordered his followers to dig at that spot. When they did so, they found the coffin of a man who had been of enormous size (as would be expected of a hero of old), with a bronze spear and a sword lying beside it. Thinking that these must surely be the remains and weapons of Theseus, Cimon brought them back to Athens to great public enthusiasm, and the exiled hero was thus received back into his city.⁶¹

It should finally be mentioned that Theseus was regularly presented in Attic tragedy as a noble ruler who came to the aid of heroes and heroines from elsewhere when they fell victim to misfortune and injustice. He granted sanctuary to the blind and exiled Oedipus at Colonos just outside Athens, saving him and his daughter from being hauled back to Thebes by Creon (see p. 348); at the urging of Adrastus, he forced Creon, king of Thebes, to consent to the burial of the Argive dead after the expedition of the Seven (see p. 358); and he granted refuge to the Heraclids at Athens after the death of their father and helped them to defeat their persecutor, Eurystheus (see p. 277).

Acamas and Demophon, the sons of Theseus; the last Theseid kings of

Menestheus ruled at Athens without further incident until he left to take part in the Trojan War. He is an ancient figure who appears in the *Iliad* as the leader of the Athenian contingent at Troy, and he was listed in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* as one of Helen's suitors.⁶² Although Homer remarks that few could equal him, and Nestor alone could rival him in the marshalling of chariots and fighting men, he is by far from prominent in the *Iliad*, making only a few brief appearances in the battle scenes.⁶³ Nothing is reported in the Homeric epics about his ultimate fate, but it is agreed in later sources that he did not return to Athens after the war, either because he was killed at Troy, or because he settled on Melos afterwards, or in Italy, or even in Iberia, and the way was thus left open for one or both of the sons of Theseus to recover their father's throne.⁶⁴

Theseus died on Scyros, as we have seen, shortly before the outbreak of the war. His sons DEMOPHON and ACAMAS are not mentioned in the Homeric epics, but that is by no means surprising because they were exiles who had no followers to lead to war. It is known, however, that two later epics in the Trojan cycle, the *Little Iliad* and *Sack of Troy*, described how they recovered their grandmother Aithra from Troy at the end of the war. She had been serving Helen as a maidservant since the Dioscuri had captured her while rescuing Helen from Attica, and she stole out of Troy at the time of its fall, according to the *Little Iliad*, and found her way to the Greek camp, where she was recognized by her grandsons. Demophon asked Agamemnon to allow them to take her home to Athens, and he granted the necessary permission, but only after first having obtained Helen's consent (for he evidently regarded her as still holding legitimate authority over Aithra). Less is known about how this story was treated in the *Sack of Troy*, since it is merely reported that her grandsons found her (perhaps in the city itself) and took her home.⁶⁵ In the standard later tradition and probably in these early epics too, the two brothers were said to have sailed to Troy at the end of the war for the specific purpose of recovering their grandmother. It was also suggested, however, that they fought in the war under the Euboean chieftain Elephenor, who led a Euboean contingent to Troy after having offered them refuge as exiles.⁶⁶

According to a tale of Hellenistic origin, Acamas had visited Troy before the fighting began, travelling there with Diomedes to try to negotiate the return of Helen; and while he was there, Laodice, an unmarried daughter of Priam, fell desperately in love with him, and slipped into his bed, pretending to be one of Priam's concubines, after he had attended a feast at Dardanso, a town in the Troad. She bore him a son as a result, called Mounitios, who was brought up by Aithra. Mounitios was united with his father after the war and set off for Athens with him, but died of a snakebite on the way when they went ashore in Thrace. For the more conventional mythology of Laodice, see p. 488.⁶⁷

Now that Menestheus was out of the way, one or both of the brothers recovered their father's throne after the war. It was usually said that one of them achieved that after the other had lost his life on the way, as the result as the result of an encounter with a Thracian princess called PHYLLIS, who was the daughter of the king of the

Bisaltians or Edonians of south-western Thrace. According to Apollodorus, Phyllis fell in love with Demophon when he called in at her land, and her father offered her to him as a wife with the kingdom as a dowry. He wanted to return to his own land after a while, however, and set sail in spite of her pleadings, fending her off by swearing that he would come back to her in due course. She accompanied him as far as a place called Nine Ways and gave him a casket, saying that it contained an object sacred to Mother Rhea, and telling him not to open it unless he had abandoned all hope of returning to her. When the appointed time for his return had elapsed, Phyllis cursed him and killed herself; and when her faithless husband, who had settled in Cyprus for some reason, opened the casket, he was overcome by terror, and leapt on to his horse and galloped away at such a pace that the horse stumbled, causing him to be thrown off and fall on to his sword.⁶⁸ Acamas sometimes replaces Demophon as the hero (if that is the right term) of this story; it is likely, indeed, that he was the original husband of Phyllis, because he is mentioned in this role before his brother and had early connections with Thrace. Aeschines, an Athenian orator of the fourth century BC, states that he received the town of Nine Ways (Ennea Hodoi) as his dowry;⁶⁹ this was the original name of Amphipolis, a town on the Thracian coast that was seized and colonized by the Athenians in 437 BC, and some claimed that it had been called Nine Ways because Phyllis ran down to the shore at that spot nine times on the day on which her husband was due to return.⁷⁰ A lost account by Callimachus seems to have helped to establish the popularity of the story of Phyllis.⁷¹

The name of the unhappy princess, which was in fact derived from the name of a district in Thrace, bears a resemblance to the Greek word for leaves (*phylla*), and an epilogue was thus added to her legend to explain why they came to be known as such. On the anniversary of her death, so it was said, the trees that sprang up by her tomb used to weep for her each year by shedding their leaves, and leaves came to be named *phylla* after her as a result;⁷² or in a rather different account, Phyllis was transformed into an almond tree after her suicide, and this tree brought forth leaves for the first time when her betrayer (Demophon in this case) embraced its trunk after making a belated return, hence the origin of their name.⁷³

When one of the sons of Theseus, Demophon in most accounts, becomes established on the Athenian throne after the Trojan War, the body of myth that began with the conception of Theseus draws to an end, and there are no further tales from early myth to be reported of his descendants. Demophon was supposed to have been succeeded by his son Oxyntes, whose son Thymoites was the last descendant of Theseus to rule at Athens.⁷⁴ For the inglorious story of how Thymoites came to lose his throne, and the subsequent end of the Athenian monarchy, see p. 284.

The earlier kings of Athens

Athenian legends and the Athenian king-list

We must now complete our survey of Athenian myth by tracing the mythical history

of Attica from the earliest times up until the birth of Theseus. Although Attica had a hero of the very first rank in Theseus, and also produced a few lesser figures such as Daedalos, Cephalos and Menestheus, who played a role in major episodes from saga, the province was of surprisingly limited significance in early heroic myth. If due exception is made for the stories that have already been covered in this and the previous chapter, most of the legends of Attica and the Athenian royal family can be assigned to the category of local myth, either as tales from folklore, or as antiquarian legends that were devised to account for the origin of local cults, institutions, and other peculiarities. Even if Attic legends of this kind were probably of no greater interest or number than those of many another province, the cultural and political prominence of Athens from the time of the Persian Wars onwards, and also the eloquence of its writers, ensured that they came to be better known than many of their equivalents in other lands. The legends of the province also attracted special interest from the mythographers. Hellanicus made a particular study of them in the fifth century BC, and authors of the Hellenistic period followed his lead by developing a special branch of literature, Attidography, that was devoted to the antiquities of the land. For reasons such as these, this largely provincial body of legend established a firm foothold in the canon of Panhellenic myth (as is attested by the full treatment of it in Apollodorus' handbook).

The Attic king-list was a highly artificial creation that did not finally acquire its definitive form, as shown in Table 19, until as late as the third century BC. In the time of Herodotus, it would seem that only four kings were recognized as having reigned before Theseus, firstly Cecrops and Erechtheus/Erichthonios, the earth-born first rulers of the land, and then Pandion and Aigeus, the two predecessors of Theseus. But since Cecrops and Erichthonios were supposed to have lived at the very beginning of history (like Pelasgos in Arcadia or Deucalion in Central Greece) while Theseus and his immediate predecessors must have lived in the period directly preceding the Trojan War, the mythographers were obliged to add several new names to the list if it was to be synchronized with comparable lines in other places, such as Argos or Thebes. This was achieved in two ways. In the first place, additional earth-born rulers, Cranaos and Amphictyon (who were already known as early mythical figures but not as kings), were inserted between Cecrops and Erichthonios at the head of the list; and second, some kings who were already included in the list were reduplicated. A second Cecrops and a second Pandion were thus introduced, while Erechtheus/Erichthonios (who was originally the same person under two different names, see p. 322) was divided into two separate individuals, the earth-born Erichthonios and his grandson Erechtheus, son of Pandion. By this process, the following king-list was developed: Cecrops I – Cranaos – Amphictyon – Erichthonios – Pandion I – Erechtheus – Cecrops II – Pandion II – Aigeus – Theseus. Since the early kings of Athens not only originated in cult rather than in heroic myth, but were also reduplicated in some cases, it is hardly surprising that most of them should be insubstantial figures with few proper myths. As a further step in the systematization of Attic myth, mythographers allocated floating stories associated with other heroes or heroines to a specific point in time, usually by attaching the relevant hero or heroine to the royal line as a child or descendant of a particular king.

Cecrops, the earth-born first king of Athens, and his children

CECROPS, who was generally regarded as the first king of Athens, was supposed to have sprung from the earth, and he bore the marks of his chthonic origin in his twofold form, having a serpent's tail in place of human legs.⁷⁵ The autochthony of Cecrops and Erichthonios (and of Cranaos and Amphictyon too in the fully developed king-list) reflected the proud claim of the Athenians to be an 'autochthonous' or indigenous people who had inhabited their land from very ancient times, and provided a mythical confirmation for that claim; as it happens, this cherished belief of theirs was not wholly unfounded, for the Athenians had inhabited their own land for longer than most of their neighbours, and certainly for longer than the Dorians in the Peloponnese. Since the Athenians were also distinguished by the special relationship that they enjoyed with Athena, the guardian-goddess of their city and land, it was assumed that the goddess must have established herself as the patroness of the land in the time of its first king, so ensuring that the city acquired its proper identity at the very beginning of its history (just as the Argives assumed that Hera had established herself as the great goddess of their land in the time of their first king, Phoroneus, see p. 128). As has been recounted in connection with the mythology of Poseidon, Athena won her position in the city by defeating Poseidon in a contest for the land (see pp. 127–8); and Cecrops played a crucial part in determining the outcome in most accounts, whether by acting as arbitrator (on his own or in conjunction with his successor Cranaos), or by bearing witness before the twelve gods that Athena had laid claim to the land by planting the first olive tree there.⁷⁶

This is the only myth from the early tradition in which Cecrops is assigned any active role, for he was a venerable ancestral figure rather than a subject of legend. His mythology underwent further development, however, in the Hellenistic period, for when the Atthidographers of the Hellenistic period set out to provide a coherent account of the growth of civilization in Athens, they described Cecrops as a primordial culture-hero who had introduced the first elements of civilization to Attica (or indeed to the human race) and had founded some of the most ancient cults of the land, much as Phoroneus was supposed to have done in Argos, or Pelasgos in Arcadia. Among other innovations, he was said to have introduced the first laws, the building of cities, the practice of burying the dead, the use of animal-skins for clothing, and even the art of writing (although Cadmos, see p. 334, and Palamedes were more favoured candidates for that particular honour).⁷⁷ The best-known story of this kind, the one that presents him as the inventor of monogamous marriage, was apparently devised to provide a rationalistic (if far-fetched) explanation for the origin of the idea of his hybrid form; for Clearchus of Soloi, an Aristotelean philosopher of the early Hellenistic period, claimed that he had come to be credited with this form because he had tried to abolish promiscuity in favour of a permanent union between men and women, in which the contrasting natures of each would be united into one.⁷⁸ In the religious realm, Cecrops was said to have founded the cult of Zeus Hypatos (the Highest) on the Acropolis, which could be thought to be very ancient because the god was honoured with offerings of honey-cakes rather than

with blood-sacrifices, and to have established the cult and festival of the pre-Olympian deity Cronos (see p. 32).⁷⁹ In poetic parlance, the Athenians could be called Cecropians (Cecropiai or Cecropidai) after their first king, and Athens the city of Cecrops.

Instead of taking a local nymph as his wife as did many primordial rulers, Cecrops married Aglauros, the daughter of a certain Actaios (or Actaion); some antiquarians claimed that this Actaios ('Coast-man') had in fact preceded him as the first king of Athens, which had originally been named Acte after him. Aglauros (or Agrauros) bore three notable daughters, Herse, Pandrosos, and Aglauros (or Agrauros), to her semi-serpentine husband, and also a son of lesser interest called Erysichthon, who did not inherit the throne because it was passed on to subsequent earth-born kings.⁸⁰

ERYSICHTHON was a minor culture-hero who was associated primarily with Prasiai on the east coast of Attica, where he was said to have died, when still young and childless, while returning from the holy island of Delos with a statue of Eileithuia, goddess of childbirth. Of the three ancient wooden images (*xoana*) of the goddess that could be seen at her temple at Athens, one was identified as the image that Erysichthon had brought from Delos, while the other two were supposed to have been brought from Crete several generations later by Phaidra (the Cretan princess who married Theseus). Erysichthon's tomb could be seen at Prasiai, where his corpse was said to have been buried after his ship had arrived in port.⁸¹

Although his three sisters HERSE, PANDROSOS, and AGLAUROS, known collectively as the Cecropides or Aglaurides, were best known for the part that they played in the story of the birth and infancy of Erichthonios (see p. 321), a later king of Athens whose mythology will be considered below, all three of them were also said to have embarked on love affairs with gods, which resulted in the birth of various minor children. According to a fairly old tradition, Aglauros bore a daughter ALCIPE to Ares, the god of war. This Alcippe appears together with her father in a legend that was devised to account for the origin of the Areiopagos, an ancient high court at Athens, which tried crimes involving bloodshed. When a brutal son of Poseidon called Halirrhothios (Sea-foam) tried to rape Alcippe, Ares caught him in the act and killed him, much to the anger of Poseidon, who prosecuted the war-god for murder in a trial judged by the twelve gods (i.e. the other major Olympian gods). In the course of the trial, which was held on a hill to the west of the Acropolis that was known thenceforth as the Areiopagos (Hill of Ares), Ares persuaded the court that he had been justified in killing a man who was trying to rape a close relation of his (as would have been acceptable in classical Athens if the rapist were killed at once after being caught in the act).⁸² In the three subsequent trials that were held on the Areiopagos in mythical times, Cephalos was condemned to exile for accidentally killing his wife (see p. 326), Daidalos was condemned to death in his absence for murdering his nephew (see p. 289), and, most famously of all, Orestes was said to have been before this court for killing his mother Clytemnestra, in the first case to be judged by a jury of Athenian citizens (see p. 516).

Other tales told how the god Hermes was supposed to have entered into liaisons with one or more of the daughters of Cecrops. Pandrosos (or one or other of her

sisters) bore him a son Ceryx (Herald), who was of some local importance as the mythical ancestor of the Eleusinian family of the Ceryces, which provided the heralds who presided at the Eleusinian Mysteries.⁸³ This at least was the belief of the Ceryces themselves, since there was also another tradition that suggested that Ceryx had been a son of Eumolpos, a figure who was closely associated with Eleusis and the Mysteries, see p. 323.⁸⁴ Herse was also seduced by Hermes and bore him a son called Cephalos, who grew up to be so beautiful that he was abducted by Eos, goddess of the dawn (see p. 45).⁸⁵ This Cephalos should properly be distinguished from the Cephalos who married Procris, a later princess of Athens, although the two were sometimes confused in ancient times, as we will see (p. 326).

The traditional story of the liaison between Hermes and Herse inspired the development of a tale of sisterly jealousy that is recounted by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. On seeing the lovely Herse among the maidens who were carrying the sacred objects to the temple of Athena during the great festival of the Panathenaia, Hermes fell desperately in love with her; and when he tried to find her at her home afterwards, he encountered her sister Aglauros, who offered to help him if he would reward her with a fortune in gold. Athena was angry with Aglauros, however, for having opened the chest that contained the infant Erichthonios (see below), and the goddess was thus determined that she should not win the favour of Hermes and a fortune in gold besides. So, she incited Envy (Invidia in Ovid's Latin) to frustrate her plan by causing her to become jealous of her sister for having gained the love of a god. Overcome by this new-found jealousy, Aglauros was no longer willing to assist Hermes when he arrived to court her sister, but seated herself in front of the door of Herse's bedroom to prevent him from entering. When she persisted in her action, in spite of his appeals, retorting that she would remain exactly where she was, he said 'Granted!' and turned her to stone, opening up the door with a wave of his wand. The stone was as dark as Aglauros' thoughts. This tale was apparently of Hellenistic origin, at least in its original form, since a papyrus from Herculaneum has revealed an earlier version, probably by Callimachus, in which Pandrosos was the sister who was turned to stone.⁸⁶

Three further earth-born kings, Cranaos, Amphictyon, and Erichthonios

As was noted above, two minor figures, Cranaos and Amphictyon, were inserted into the king-list as successors of Cecrops. The earth-born CRANAOS ruled at the time of the great flood and was thus a contemporary of Deucalion, who even sought refuge with him in one account; he named the land of Attica after his daughter Atthis, who was borne to him along with two other daughters by his Spartan wife Pedias.⁸⁷ Cranaos was eventually driven out by AMPHICTYON, who was earth-born once again (although he was sometimes identified with the son of Deucalion of that name, whose proper home was Thermopylae, see p. 375). This was an act of treachery on the part of Amphictyon in one account because he was married to the king's daughter Atthis (although this conflicts with another tradition in which Cranaos named the land after her when she died young as an unmarried girl). There is nothing of interest to report of Amphictyon, except that Dionysos was supposed to

have visited him in Athens and taught him how to mix water into wine in due proportion (for it was the Greek custom to water wine before serving it).⁸⁸

After twelve years, Amphictyon was expelled in his turn by yet another earth-born hero, ERICHTHONIOS.⁸⁹ By contrast to autochthonous beings like Cecrops and Pelasgos who sprang from the earth without need of a father, Erichthonios was conceived by Gaia (Earth) to a specific father, the god Hephaistos, in circumstances that have already been described (see p. 158). For when the excited god once tried to force himself on the virgin goddess at Athens and was thrust away, he shed some semen on to the ground, causing Gaia to conceive this child. When Gaia brought him to birth, she rose up from the ground to present him to Athena, who shut him up in a chest and entrusted it to one or all of the daughters of Cecrops, strictly ordering them not to open it under any circumstances. As mentioned just above, these maidens were named Herse, Pandrosos, and Aglauros. Needless to say, the temptation to look was irresistible, and one or more of the sisters peeped into the chest, with disastrous consequences. In the earliest surviving account, in Euripides' *Ion*, the three sisters opened the chest to discover that Athena had placed two guardian snakes in it along with the child, and they met a bloody death afterwards on some rocks, presumably after having thrown themselves down from the Acropolis in terror or madness, as in some later accounts. It is generally stated in subsequent sources that one or two of the sisters alone peeped into the chest, and that Athena had placed one or two snakes inside to guard the child. According to Apollodorus, the chest was entrusted to Pandrosos, but was then opened by her two sisters, who saw a snake coiled around the infant; and in some accounts, so he reports, the guilty sisters were killed by the snake, while in other accounts they were sent mad by Athena and hurled themselves down from the Acropolis. Herse and Aglauros were the erring sisters in Pausanias' account too, although the chest is now said to have been entrusted to all three of them; or in an account by the early Hellenistic mythographer Amelesagoras, the offence was committed by Aglauros and Pandrosos, or in Ovid's version, by Aglauros alone, not that these variations make any great difference. If Athena was planning to make the child immortal, as Apollodorus alone suggests, the girls may have frustrated her plans through their action.⁹⁰

After recovering the child, Athena assumed parental responsibility for him and reared him on the Acropolis, and so came as close to being a mother to him as was possible for a virgin goddess. The special relationship that she had established with Athens in the time of Cecrops was thus deepened; and this strange birth-legend also explained how the city came to be placed under the joint patronage of Athena and Hephaistos, as two deities who presided over the handicrafts that were so essential to the city's prosperity.

In the Hellenistic and later tradition, a clear distinction was drawn between this Erichthonios, as the marvellous child who was born from the earth and reared by Athena, and Erechtheus, as a subsequent ruler who was remembered in more adult roles as a leader in war and paterfamilias, and was honoured in cult on the Acropolis in close connection with Poseidon. It is generally believed, however, that this distinction with the accompanying division of roles was first established for chronological reasons by the mythographers, and that the two figures were originally

a single person under alternative names. The most telling evidence for this can be found in the fact that Homer and Herodotus use the name Erechtheus when talking of the earth-born hero, as in a passage in the *Iliad* that refers to 'greathearted Erechtheus, who was reared of old by Athena, daughter of Zeus, when the grain-giving ploughland brought him to birth'.⁹¹ We have no unequivocal evidence for the name Erichthonios until it appears in the visual arts and tragedy in the second half of the fifth century BC (although it is reported without direct citation that Pindar and the author of the *Danaïds*, an early epic of uncertain date, applied the name to the earth-born child).⁹² It seems very likely in any case that the longer name was of later origin, especially in view of the fact that Erechtheus/Erichthonios was known as Erechtheus in connection with his cult on the Acropolis.

After the mythical inheritance came to be divided in between the now separate figures, only a single notable deed was assigned to Erichthonios as an adult, namely the founding of the Panathenaia, the principal festival of Athena at Athens; since he was identified as the nursling who had been reared by Athena, it is understandable that this particular action should have been credited to him rather than to Erechtheus. Since games were held in connection with the festival, it was further suggested that he invented the four-horse chariot and used to compete as a chariot-driver in the games; and an astral myth adds that Zeus was so impressed by his initiative in imitating the sun-god Helios (who travelled across the sky in a chariot of this kind, see p. 41) that he raised him to the heavens to become the constellation of the Charioteer (Auriga). It is no surprise to discover that his wife, who is described as a naiad nymph, bore the same name, Praxithea, as the wife of Erechtheus; she bore him a single son, Pandion, who succeeded him as king of Athens.⁹³

Pandion and his daughters, Procne and Philomela

This PANDION, the first king of that name to reign at Athens, married his maternal aunt Zeuxippe, who bore him two sons, Erechtheus and Boutes, and two daughters, Procne and Philomela.⁹⁴ He was remembered above all as the father of these daughters, who came to be transformed into birds in very grim circumstances, although it should also be mentioned that the story of Icarios (which tells how wine was first introduced into Attica, see p. 170) was supposed to have been set in his reign.

When Pandion became embroiled in a border-dispute with Labdacos, king of Thebes, he sought the assistance of TEREUS, king of Thrace, a fierce son of Ares; and after bringing the war to a successful conclusion with his aid, he expressed his gratitude by offering him his elder daughter PROCNE as a wife. So, Tereus took her away to his northern homeland, where she bore him a son, Itys, and everything went well initially, until Procne began to feel lonely and asked her husband to travel to Athens to fetch her sister PHILOMELA for a visit. While travelling back with Philomela, he was overcome by lust for her and raped her, and then cut out her tongue and hid her away in a remote spot to conceal his crime, telling Procne that she had died in the course of the journey. But Philomela wove an account of her sufferings into a tapestry and sent it to her sister, who fetched her and set to work to

exact ruthless revenge on Tereus. Slaughtering Itys, the only child of their union, she boiled his flesh, and served it as a meal to her unknowing husband, and then took flight with Philomela, heading southwards. As soon as Tereus discovered the true nature of the meal, he hastily seized an axe and chased after the two sisters, finally catching up with them at Daulis, an ancient town in Central Greece lying to the east of Delphi. They prayed for help to the gods, who took pity on them and transformed the pursuer and pursued alike into birds, turning Procne into a nightingale, Philomela into a swallow, and Tereus into a hoopoe.⁹⁵

This story was portrayed, apparently in some such form as this, in a lost play by Sophocles, the *Tereus*. It was sometimes said that Tereus was transformed not into a hoopoe, as in Sophocles' play, but into a hawk, a bird that could be well be imagined as harrying a nightingale, an idea first expressed in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*.⁹⁶ A curious confusion entered the tradition when the story came to be recounted by Roman authors, for it comes to be suggested in Latin sources that Procne was turned into the swallow and Philomela into the nightingale,⁹⁷ missing the point of the original story, in which Procne could be imagined as singing melodious laments for her lost son, while the tongueless Philomela could merely chatter away inarticulately as a swallow. As fate would have it, however, the defective secondary version was the one that came to be transmitted into the modern tradition at the Renaissance, hence the use of Philomela's name (in one form or another) in modern European languages as a poetic name for a nightingale. In some late ancient sources the murdered Itys is also said to have been transformed into a bird, in his case into a pheasant.⁹⁸ According to Ovid at least, Pandion died of grief after learning of the fate of his daughters.⁹⁹ Although Tereus was always regarded as a Thracian, he was sometimes said to have ruled at Daulis in Central Greece, as mentioned by Thucydides, or even closer to Athens at Pagai in the Megarid; in the latter case he was said to have committed suicide after Procne and Philomela escaped into neighbouring Attica, and in either case this would have made him a more obvious choice of ally for Pandion than if he had lived in distant Thrace.¹⁰⁰

Erechtheus and his war against Eumolpos and the Eleusinians

After Pandion's death, his twin sons divided the inheritance between them, ERECHTHEUS taking the throne, and BOUTES the priesthood of Athena and Poseidon (for the two deities had a joint cult in the Erechtheion).¹⁰¹ Boutes was the eponymous ancestor of the Boutadai and Eteoboutadai, the families that provided the priestesses for the cult of Athena Polias; he had a heroic shrine of his own in the Erechtheion.¹⁰² Erechtheus married Praxithea, daughter of Phrasimos, a granddaughter of the Attic river-god Cephisos. She bore him four daughters, Procris, Oreithuia, Creousa, and Chthonia, and various sons including a second Cecrops, who became the next king of Athens, and Metion, whose sons later seized power for a time by expelling Erechtheus' grandson. The ever-ingenuous Daidalos, whose exploits have already been considered, was often classed as a grandson of Erechtheus, either through Metion or through another son of his called Eupalamos (i.e. Handyman, the Ingenious).¹⁰³

The most notable event in the reign of Erechtheus was a war between Athens and the town of Eleusis about twelve miles to the north-west; the legend of this conflict served to explain how Eleusis, with its famous mystery-cult (which had supposedly been founded by Demeter herself, see p. 95), came to be absorbed into the Athenian state. The legend first appears in the remains of a lost play by Euripides, the *Erechtheus*. When the war broke out, the Eleusinians summoned the aid of EUMOLPOS, son of Poseidon, who marched to their assistance with a large force of Thracians. In the face of this threat, Erechtheus consulted the Delphic oracle, which declared that the Athenians would prevail if the king sacrificed one of his daughters; and when he duly slaughtered his youngest daughter, sometimes named as Chthonia, his surviving daughters committed suicide because all of them had sworn beforehand to share the fate of the chosen victim.¹⁰⁴ This story provided a mythical explanation for the origin of the Hyacinthides, a group of heroines or minor goddesses who were honoured in Attic cult;¹⁰⁵ it is not easily reconciled with the traditions described below in which the king's daughters were said to have contracted splendid marriages (unless it assumed that it was only his unmarried daughters who lost their lives in this way). There were also accounts in which Erechtheus slaughtered more than one of his daughters.¹⁰⁶ Although he proceeded to defeat the enemy in accordance with the oracle, killing Eumolpos in battle, Poseidon was so angered by the death of his son that he killed Erechtheus in his turn or asked Zeus to kill him with a thunderbolt; according to Euripides, Poseidon struck the ground with his trident after the battle, causing the king to be swallowed up in a chasm.¹⁰⁷ After suffering this defeat, the Eleusinians made peace with the Athenians, on the agreement that their city would be subject to Athens from that time onwards but that they would continue to administer the mysteries independently.¹⁰⁸ In historical times, sacrifices were offered to Erechtheus as a hero at the altar of Poseidon in the Erechtheion.¹⁰⁹

Since Eumolpos was the eponymous ancestor of the Eumolpidae, the family that provided the priests who officiated at the Eleusinian Mysteries, it seems most unlikely that he was originally regarded as a foreigner from Thrace, and our earliest source for him, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, includes him indeed among the Eleusinian princes who were instructed in the mysteries by Demeter.¹¹⁰ He was presented as a Thracian, however, in Euripides' *Erechtheus*, apparently as a son who had been borne to Poseidon by Chione, a daughter of Boreas, the god of the North Wind, whose home lay in that northern land.¹¹¹ Since Chione's mother Oreithuia was a daughter of Erechtheus who had been abducted from Athens by Boreas (see p. 325), this would mean that Eumolpos was of partly Athenian descent in spite of his Thracian birth. Apollodorus may be consulted for a corresponding account of his earlier life, which may well have been based on information provided in Euripides' play.¹¹² Some authors, including Isocrates, suggest that Eumolpos was hoping to seize Athens for himself, laying claim to it on the ground that it properly belonged to his father Poseidon rather than to Athena (i.e. because he thought that Athena had been wrongly adjudged the winner when the two deities had competed for the land, see p. 128).¹¹³

There was also a version of the legend in which Eumolpos was not killed by Erechtheus but survived to return to Eleusis, where he presided over the mysteries;

in that case, it was his son (here called Immarados) who fell victim to the Athenian king.¹¹⁴ Eumolpos is indeed quite often described as the founder of the Mysteries in late sources,¹¹⁵ although some authors specify that the Eumolpos in question was either a descendant of the present Eumolpos or an unrelated son of Mousaios.¹¹⁶

The daughters of Erechtheus, and the legend of Cephalos and Procris

Irrespective of the above-mentioned tale of their sacrifice and suicide, the daughters of Erechtheus were said to have married, and two indeed were said to have had remarkable adventures. CHTHONIA, who is sometimes named as the daughter who was sacrificed, was otherwise supposed to have married her uncle Boutes (see p. 322),¹¹⁷ while CREOUSA married Xouthos, a son of Hellen who took refuge in Athens after being exiled from his native Thessaly, and became the mother of Ion and Achaïos (see p. 377). For Euripides' exceptional portrayal of the history of Creousa and Ion, in which she had quite as eventful a life as her other two sisters, see p. 377.

OREITHUIA was carried away by Boreas, the wild North Wind, while she was playing or gathering flowers by the banks of the Ilissos, just outside Athens, in quiet and pretty surroundings that are described by Plato at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*. An altar was erected to Boreas at the spot where this was supposed to have happened. Or, in other accounts, she was seized from the Acropolis or Areiopagos. As Plato remarks, the myth could easily be rationalized if it was imagined that she had been blown to her death from some rocks by a gust of wind. The legend stated all the same that Boreas carried her off to his chilly home in Thrace, where she bore him twin sons, Zetes and Calais, known jointly as the Boreads (Boreadai), winged beings who were able to fly through the air like their divine father. For the famous myth of how they pursued the Harpies while sailing with the Argonauts, see p. 403. Boreas and Oreithuia also had two daughters, Chione ('Snow-woman'), who bore Eumolpos to Poseidon, and Cleopatra, who became the first wife of the Thracian seer Phineus (see p. 402).¹¹⁸

The Athenians were proud to claim that they had a privileged relationship with Boreas because he had married this princess of theirs, and he was supposed to have come to their aid in more than one moment of peril. When they were under threat from the Persian fleet in 480 BC, an oracle advised them to 'call on the aid of their son-in-law', and they duly offered sacrifice to Boreas and his Athenian consort. He promptly responded by blowing up a savage storm, which destroyed a great many Persian ships as they were lying in an exposed position off southern Thessaly. A comparable stroke of good fortune twelve years earlier, when the fleet of Darios was struck by a storm off Athos, was also attributed to the good services of the wind-god.¹¹⁹ Stories of this kind doubtless contributed to the popularity of the local legend of Oreithuia's abduction, which is depicted very frequently and often very vividly in Athenian vase-paintings.

PROCRIIS, the remaining daughter of Erechtheus, married CEPHALOS, a son of Deion (or Deioneus), son of Aiolos, from Central Greece, and lived with him in the country outside Athens. There are several conflicting accounts of their troubled

marriage. In the earliest surviving narrative by Pherecydes, Cephalos subjected her to a bizarre test soon after their wedding by abandoning her for eight years and then returning in disguise to see whether he could seduce her by offering her some finery; but although she yielded to the temptation, the two of them patched up their differences and resumed their married life. She later came to suspect, however, that he was seeing another woman because he was spending so much of his time away on hunting trips. When she questioned a servant about the matter, he confirmed her suspicions by telling her that he had seen his master on a hilltop calling out repeatedly, 'Come here, Nephele!' Supposing that he had been summoning a woman called Nephele (Cloud), even though he had really been calling for shade from the sun, Procris concealed herself on the same hill to spy on his actions; and when he called out once again just as the servant had described, she jumped up and ran to confront him, giving him such a start that he hurled his spear as an instinctive reaction and so caused her death.¹²⁰

In subsequent accounts, Procris is often said to have left home for a time after her husband caught her committing an infidelity or trapped her into doing so. According to Apollodorus, a certain Pteleon won his way into her bed by offering her a golden crown, and she sought refuge with Minos in Crete after her husband found out. Minos fell in love with her and was eager to seduce her; but his wife Pasiphae had become so exasperated by his infidelities that she had put a spell on him, causing him to ejaculate wild beasts (snakes, scorpions, and millipedes, according to another source) if he ever slept with another woman, with fatal effect on her. In return for two precious gifts, however, a very swift dog and a marvellous hunting-spear that always hit its mark, Procris found a cure for his malady by giving him a magical potion containing the 'Circaian root', and then went to bed with him. Fearing the jealousy of Pasiphae, she then returned to Athens, taking the gifts with her, and reached an accommodation with her husband. She liked to go hunting with him, for she was as fond of hunting as he was; and as she was pursuing some game through the thicket one day, Cephalos hurled his javelin (presumably the infallible one from Crete) without realizing that it was her, and struck her dead. He was tried for murder as a consequence at the court of the Areiopagos, and was condemned to perpetual exile (rather than to death as would have been the case if the killing had been deliberate). He chose to settle at Thebes.¹²¹ Or, in an account from a poem in the epic cycle, he went to Thebes to be purified after committing the involuntary killing, and was thus available to allow the wonderful dog from Crete to be used against the Teumessian fox (see pp. 235–6).¹²² This early reference would suggest that the tale of Procris' journey to Crete may have been quite ancient, and it may be significant in that regard that a Procris should be mentioned by Homer in the company of Phaidra and Ariadne (both daughters of Minos) among the women who were seen by Odysseus in the Underworld.¹²³ Procris' death-story first appears in the visual arts in the second half of the fifth century BC.

A further complication was introduced into the story if the present Cephalos is identified with the Cephalos who was abducted by Eos (properly a wholly different person, a son of Hermes, see p. 45, rather than a son of Deion). It seems likely that this was an innovation introduced by Nicander. We may start with the familiar

account in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* before passing on to that recorded by Antoninus, which probably follows Nicander more closely (although no source is indicated). The dawn-goddess abducted Cephalos two months after his marriage, so Ovid relates, but he yearned so passionately for his wife that the goddess soon lost patience with him and sent him back to her. In her anger at being scorned, however, Eos encouraged him to doubt the fidelity of his wife, and transformed his appearance to enable him to test her in the guise of a stranger. By promising her a fortune in return for her favours, he brought her to the point of yielding and then revealed his true identity. Overcome by shame, and feeling resentment at the male sex on account of his underhand behaviour, she left home in shame to wander the hills as a huntress. Finding that he was tormented by love in her absence, he finally sought a reconciliation, confessing that he too might have yielded to such a temptation. So, she returned to him, bringing two marvellous gifts, a swift-running dog and a wonderful spear, which she had received from Artemis in this version. Rather as in the story from Pherecydes above, she was later told that Cephalos was in the habit of calling out for Aura while out hunting, and inferred from this that he was meeting with a nymph of that name (although he was really calling for a cooling breeze, as *aura* can mean in both Greek and Latin). So she hid herself in the hunting field to spy on him, and when he heard her in the undergrowth, he hurled his unerring spear in that direction in the belief that a wild animal was hiding there.¹²⁴

Antoninus' account follows a similar course initially, except that Cephalos asked one of his friends to test the virtue of his wife after he had been kept away for a while by Eos. Although she refused an initial offer of gold, she agreed to sleep with the stranger when he doubled the bribe, and was duly caught by her husband when she arrived for the assignation. She abandoned him in shame and sought refuge with Minos in Crete. As in Apollodorus' version above, she won the favour of Minos by helping him to overcome his strange sexual problem; in this account he was distressed by this affliction (which is not said to have been imposed on him by his wife) because it was preventing him from fathering children by his wife. Procris contrived a mechanical solution by inserting a goat's bladder into a woman's vagina and causing him to discharge the snakes, scorpions, and millipedes into it before he had intercourse with his wife. On finding that he was therefore now able to father children by her, he rewarded Procris by giving her the infallible dog and hunting-spear. She then returned to Attica and put Cephalos to the test in his turn. Cutting her hair short and changing into male clothing, she approached him in the guise of a young man and showed him the wonderful dog and spear; and he was so eager to possess them that he agreed to submit to the stranger in homosexual intercourse as the price for acquiring them. Procris then revealed her true identity and accused him of having committed an even worse fault than her own. Antoninus concludes by telling how the dog was used against the Teumessian fox, without making any reference to the death of Procris.¹²⁵

We may conclude with a related account offered by Hyginus. Eos accosted Cephalos while he was out hunting one morning, but he rejected her, saying that he had sworn to remain faithful to his wife. So the goddess transformed his appearance and gave him some beautiful gifts to enable him to test whether his wife was as

faithful as he was. Procris was caught out in the usual way and fled to Crete, where she sought to join the hunting party of Artemis; but she was turned away because the goddess accepted virgins alone as her companions. On hearing Procris' story, however, Artemis felt sorry for her, and gave her the unfailing dog and spear and sent her off to test Cephalos. She achieved this in the same way as in the preceding version. The couple resumed their married life now that the wrongs were balanced out, and all might have been well if Procris had not feared that her husband might be meeting Eos in secret. As she was spying on him from some bushes at daybreak one morning, he saw the vegetation stirring and unwittingly killed her by hurling his infallible javelin in that direction.¹²⁶

The second Cecrops, and the second Pandion, and his sons

To return to the highly artificial history of the Athenian succession that was developed by the Attidographers, Erechtheus was succeeded by his son CECROPS, the second king of that name, who either inherited the throne as the eldest son or was awarded it through the arbitration of Xouthos, son of Hellen (see p. 378).¹²⁷ This second Cecrops, a nonentity who was invented for chronological reasons, was succeeded by his son, PANDION II, who was soon forced into exile by his cousins, the sons of Metion. He sought refuge with Pylas, the king of the neighbouring province of Megara, who offered him his daughter, Pylia, as a wife. When Pylas himself was later obliged to depart into exile after killing his uncle Bias, he transferred the kingdom to his Athenian son-in-law and went away to the Peloponnese.¹²⁸

While in Megara, Pandion fathered four sons, Aigeus, Pallas, Nisos, and Lycos, who reconquered Athens after his death and expelled the usurpers. Although the brothers agreed to divide the kingdom between them, AIGEUS held all the power, to the increasing discontent of PALLAS, who eventually mounted a revolt with the support of his fifty sons after Theseus arrived in Athens (see pp. 308–9).¹²⁹ LYCOS, who was credited with prophetic powers, was the eponymous ancestor of the Lycomides, an important priestly clan at Athens; he was finally expelled by Aigeus and either settled in Messenia with Aphareus (see p. 448), whom he instructed in the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, or else in Lycia in Asia Minor, hence the name of that land (see p. 300).¹³⁰ NISOS for his part ruled in Megara as Pandion's successor, recognizing that Aigeus had the best right to the Athenian throne as the eldest brother.¹³¹ Aigeus was significant above all as the father of Theseus, and with the story of how he came to father that great hero, after having long remained childless, we arrive back at the point at which we started our survey of Athenian myth (see p. 392). Nisos also figures in the body of myth associated with Theseus and Minos, since Minos attacked him at Megara (see p. 291) before proceeding to Athens to impose the tribute of food for the Minotaur.

Notes

¹ Isocrates *Helen* 35, D.S. 4.61.8–9, Plut. *Thes.* 24.

- 2 Thuc. 2.15.
- 3 Plut. *Thes.* 23–5.
- 4 Ibid. 13 (claim that Aigeus merely adopted), Apollod. 3.15.5 (Scyrios said to have been true father).
- 5 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.11, Plut. *Thes.* 13, Eur. *Hippol.* 34–7 (cf. Paus. 1.22.2) respectively.
- 6 Plut. *Thes.* 13, cf. Philochorus 328F108 (schol. Eur. *Hippol.* 35); earliest reference Eur. l.c.
- 7 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.16 (mentioning Melanippe and Hippolyte as variants, citing Simonides for the latter, cf. Isocrates *Panathenaicus* 193), cf. Plut. *Thes.* 26.
- 8 Plut. *Thes.* 26 (citing Philochorus = 328F110), Hyg. *Fab.* 30.
- 9 Paus. 1.2.1.
- 10 ‘Most authorities, including Pherecydes (= 3F151), Hellanicus (= 4F156) and Herodorus (= 31F26), tell us that Theseus made an expedition of his own there after the time of Heracles’, Plut. *Thes.* 26; Peirithoos, Pi. fr. 175 and vase-paintings; Phorbas, Pher. 3F152.
- 11 Plut. *Thes.* 26 citing Bion.
- 12 Hellanic. 4F167.
- 13 Aesch. *Eum.* 685–90; On the Amazoneion, D.S. 4.28.2, cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 1.16 (camped by the Areiopagos).
- 14 Full account with variants in Plut. *Thes.* 27; see also D.S. 4.28.3–4, Paus. 1.2.1 (tombs of Antiope and Molpadia), 1.41.7 (Amazons flee to Megara).
- 15 E.g. Apollod. *Epit.* 1.17. Phaidra is mentioned among the celebrated women in the Underworld in Hom. *Od.* 11.321.
- 16 Plut. *Thes.* 28 citing the *Theseis* (= fr. 1 Davies).
- 17 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.17.
- 18 D.S. 4.62.1, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.17–18.
- 19 Eur. *Hippol.* I fr., and hypothes. *Hippol.* II (brief remarks on the contrast between the two plays), cf. Asclepiades 12F28 (a version of this kind, perhaps based on *Hippol.* I), Seneca *Phaedra*.
- 20 Eur. *Hippol.* (II, the surviving play).
- 21 Eur. *Hippol.* 1423–7.
- 22 All in Paus. 2.32.1.
- 23 Paus. 2.32.9.
- 24 Paus. 2.32.3.
- 25 *Naupactia* fr. 10C Davies (from Apollod. 3.10.3).
- 26 Ov. *Met.* 15.487–546.
- 27 Plut. *Thes.* 30.
- 28 Pi. *Pyth.* 2.25–48.
- 29 D.S. 4.69.3, Hom. *Il.* 14.317–18.
- 30 E.g. D.S. 4.70.3, Hyg. *Fab.* 33, Ovid *Heroides* 17.248 respectively.
- 31 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.21, D.S. 4.70.3.
- 32 War between Lapiths and Centaurs, D.S. 4.70.3–4, Plut. *Thes.* 30, Ov. *Met.* 12.210–535; Centaurs try to rape bride, conflict apparently settled in battle immediately, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.21; Theseus arrives after start of conflict, Herodorus 31F27 (from Plut. l.c.), cf. Isoc. *Helen* 26; alternative account in which war starts because Centaurs demand share of kingdom, D.S. 4.70.2.
- 33 Hom. *Il.* 1.262–72.
- 34 Hom. *Od.* 21.295–304.
- 35 Hom. *Il.* 2.741–4.
- 36 Ibid. 2.738–47.
- 37 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.22 (very brief), Ov. *Met.* 12.189–207; early references to change of sex, Hes. fr. 87, Acus. 2F22 (here called Caine as girl).
- 38 Acus. 2F22 (cf. schol. *Il.* 1.264) and schol. A.R. 1.57 respectively.
- 39 Acus 2F22, A.R. 1.59–64, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.22, Ov. *Met.* 12.459–535.
- 40 As boar-hunters, Plut. *Thes.* 29, Apollod. 1.8.2, Ov. *Met.* 8.303; as Argonauts, Hyg. *Fab.* 14 (as against A.R. 1.101–4).
- 41 Hom. *Il.* 3.143–4.
- 42 Alcman 21 (one source Paus. 1.41.5), Stesichorus 191 (see p. 361 and note).
- 43 Hellanic. 4F168b (seven), D.S. 4.63.2 (ten), Apollod. *Epit.* 1.23 (twelve).
- 44 D.S. 4.63.1–4, Plut. *Thes.* 31.
- 45 Hyg. *Fab.* 79.
- 46 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.23, schol. A.R. 1.100; Hellanic. 4F134 (because sons of Zeus and Poseidon).
- 47 Plut. *Thes.* 31.3.
- 48 *Minyas* fr. 1 Davies (cited in Paus. 10.28.1).

- 49 Hes. fr. 280.
- 50 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.24.
- 51 Panyassis fr. 9 Davies (as reported in Paus. 10.29.2), cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 1.24 (held down by snakes also), Vat. Myth. 1, 48 (chained down), Horace *Odes* 3.4.78–80 (Peirithoos still chained), 4.7.27–8 ('Lethaeian bonds').
- 52 Apollod. 2.15.2, cf. Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 1169–70 (earliest reference to rescue of Theseus), schol. A.R. 1.101.
- 53 E.g. D.S. 4.26.1 and Hyg. *Fab.* 79 (both released); D.S. 4.63.4 (some say neither released), cf. Verg. *Aen.* 610 with 617–18.
- 54 Plut. *Thes.* 32.
- 55 Stesichorus 191 (as reported in Paus. 2.22.7).
- 56 Plut. *Thes.* 31–4, D.S. 4.63.3.5, Apollod. *Epit.* 1.23–4 (suggests, perhaps mistakenly, that the Dioscuri captured Athens), Paus. 1.17.6.
- 57 Plut. *Thes.* 35.
- 58 Plut. *Thes.* 35 and Paus. 1.17.6. respectively.
- 59 Plut. *Thes.* 35 (both versions), Apollod. *Epit.* 1.24 (Lycomedes cast him into an abyss), Paus. 1.17.6 (Lycomedes plotted his death because of his high reputation), Lyc. 1324–6 with schol. 1326.
- 60 Plut. *Thes.* 35, Paus. 1.15.4.
- 61 Plut. *Thes.* 36.
- 62 Hom. *Il.* 2.546–56; Hes. fr. 200, cf. Apollod. 3.10.8.
- 63 Hom. *Il.* 2.553–5; 4.327–8, 13.331ff, 13.195–6, 689–90.
- 64 E.g. Plut. *Thes.* 35 (died at Troy), Tzetz. Lyc. 911 (went to Melos).
- 65 *Little Iliad* fr. 23 Davies, *Sack of Troy* fr. 4 Davies; Apollod. *Epit.* 5.22, Q.S. 13.496–543.
- 66 Plut. *Thes.* 35, Athen. 96d.
- 67 Parthenius 16, schol. Lyc. 495 citing Euphoriön; cf. Lyc. 494–503.
- 68 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.16–17.
- 69 Aeschines 2.13; cf. schol. Lyc. 495 (much as Apollod. except that Acamas takes the place of Demophon), Lucian *On Dancing* 40.
- 70 Hyg. *Fab.* 59.
- 71 Call. fr. 556. The story was familiar to the Roman poets, see e.g. Ov. *Rem. Am.* 591–608, *Heroides* 2, ps.Verg. *Culex* 131ff.
- 72 Hyg. *Fab.* 59.
- 73 Serv. *Ecl.* 5.10.
- 74 Paus. 2.18.7.
- 75 Apollod. 3.14.1; his double form, Eur. *Ion* 1163–4, Arist. *Wasps* 438 with schol.
- 76 Cecrops as judge, Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.10, Call. fr. 194.66–8; as witness, Call. fr. 260.25–6, Apollod. 3.14.1; Cecrops and Cranaos as judges, Apollod. l.c.
- 77 Respectively Pliny *N.H.* 7.194, Cicero *On Laws* 2.63, Philochorus 328F98, Tacitus *Annals* 11.14. On this matter in general, see Philochorus F94–8 with Jacoby's notes.
- 78 Clearchus fr. 63 Wehrli; later Justin 2.6.7, Suidas s.v. Kekrops.
- 79 Paus. 8.2.3 (Zeus Hypatos), 1.26.6 (bloodless sacrifices), Philochorus 328F97 (Cronia).
- 80 Apollod. 3.14.2 (mother and daughter named as Agrauros), Paus. 1.2.6. Aglauros the usual form, first Eur. *Ion* 23, 496. Actaios as first king of Athens. Paus. l.c., cf. Str. 397, Steph. Byz. s.v. Akte.
- 81 Died young and childless, Apollod. 3.14.2, Paus. 1.2.6; Paus. 1.31.2 (death and tomb), 1.18.5 (statue from Delos), Athen. 9, 392d (= Phanodemos 325F2, on mission to Delos).
- 82 Hellanic. 4F38, Apollod. 3.14.2, Paus. 1.21.7; Euripides alludes to the tale in *Electra* 1258–63, *Iph. Taur.* 945–6.
- 83 Son of Aglauros, Paus. 1.38.3; of Pandrosos, Androtion 324F1; of Herse, *Inscriptiones Graecae* 14.1389.
- 84 Paus. 1.38.3.
- 85 Apollod. 3.14.3; Hes. *Theog.* 986–91 refers to his connection with Eos without saying anything about his birth.
- 86 Ov. *Met.* 2.708–832, *P. Herc.* 243II.
- 87 Apollod. 3.14.5, Paus. 1.2.6, Marmor Parium 239A 2,4 Jac. (received Deucalion).
- 88 Apollod. 3.14.6, Paus. 1.2.6.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Eur. *Ion* 20–4, 267–74, Apollod. 3.14.6, Paus. 1.18.2, Amelasgoras 330F1, Ov. *Met.* 2.552–61; see also Euphoriön fr. 9 Powell, Hyg. *Fab.* 166, *Astr.* 2.13.
- 91 Hom. *Il.* 2.547–8, Hdt. 8.55.
- 92 Harpocrat. s.v. Autochthonēs, 'Pindar and the author of the *Danaïs* say that Erichthionios appeared from

- the earth' (= Pi. fr. 253 Snell, *Danaïd* fr. 2 Davies). Clear distinction between the earthborn Erichthonios and the later Erechtheus in Eur. *Ion* 8–26. The name Erichthonios first on a hydria dated to c. 440–30 BC, Berlin F2537.
- 93 Founder of Panathenaia, Hellenic. 4F39 (earliest mention), Apollod. 3.14.6; invented chariot, became constellation, Eratosth. 13, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.13.
- 94 Apollod. 3.14.8.
- 95 Ibid., cf. Conon 31, Ov. *Met.* 6.424–674; early indications, Hes. *W.D.* 568 and Sappho 135 (swallow called Pandionis), Aesch. *Suppl.* 58–67 (wife of Tereus killed own child, now pursued as nightingale by hawk, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 45 in which Tereus became hawk), Soph. *Tereus* fr. 581–95 Radt (apparently much as in later vulgate).
- 96 Hyg. *Fab.* 45, Serv. *Ecl.* 6.78, Vat. Myth. 1.4.
- 97 Serv. *Ecl.* 6.78, Vat. Myth. 1.4.
- 98 Ov. *Met.* 6.675–6.
- 99 Thuc. 2.29, Paus. 1.41.8.
- 100 Apollod. 3.14.8, Hyg. *Fab.* 45.
- 101 Apollod. 3.15.1.
- 102 Harpocration s.v. Boutes, Paus. 1.26.6 (altar).
- 103 Apollod. 3.15.1; descent of Daidalos from Erechtheus ibid. 3.15.8 (Eupalamos–Metion–Erechtheus), D.S. 4.76.1 (Metion–Eupalamos–Erechtheus), Pher. 3F146 (Metion–Erechtheus).
- 104 Apollod. 3.15.4, much as in Eur. *Erechtheus*, see fr. 360 Nauck (one of three daughters must be killed); cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 46 (curious version in which Poseidon orders the sacrifice after Erechtheus has killed Eumolpos).
- 105 Eur. fr. 50 and 65 Austin; for another explanation of the origin of the Hyacinthides. See Apollod. 3.15.8.
- 106 Eur. *Ion* 275–80 (killed all but the youngest, Creousa), Demosthenes 60.27.
- 107 Apollod. 3.15.4, Hyg. *Fab.* 46, Eur. *Ion* 281–2 (cf. *Erechtheus* fr. 65 Austin) respectively.
- 108 Paus. 13.8.3.
- 109 Paus. 1.26.6.
- 110 *Hom. Hymn Demeter* 154, 475.
- 111 See Lycurgus *Against Leocrates* 98–100.
- 112 Apollod. 3.15.4.
- 113 Isocrates *Panathenaicus* 193, Hyg. *Fab.* 46.
- 114 Paus. 1.38.3, 2.14.2.
- 115 E.g. Plut. *Moralia* 607b, Lucian *Demonax* 34.
- 116 Schol. Soph. *Oed. Col.* 1053.
- 117 Apollod. 3.5.1.
- 118 Abduction first mentioned, Simon. 534, cf. Pausanias. 5.19.1 (on chest of Cypselos); Acus. 2F30 (from Acropolis), Pl. *Phdr.* 229be, Apollod. 3.15.2, schol. A.R. 1.211.
- 119 Hdt. 7.188–9 (both incidents), Paus. 1.19.6; cf. Ael. *V.H.* 12.61 for a comparable story associated with Thurii.
- 120 Pher. 3F34.
- 121 Apollod. 3.15.1; fled to Thebes, Paus. 1.37.4.
- 122 Fr.ep.incerti loci 1 Davies.
- 123 *Hom. Od.* 11.321.
- 124 Ov. *Met.* 7.670–862.
- 125 Ant. Lib. 41.
- 126 Hyg. *Fab.* 189.
- 127 Apollod. 3.15.5, cf. Paus. 7.1.2 (Xouthos arbitrated).
- 128 Apollod. 3.15.5, Paus. 1.5.3; on exile of king of Megara in Peloponnese, Paus. 4.36.1, 6.22.5.
- 129 Apollod. 3.15.5–6, Paus. 1.39.4.
- 130 Exile in Messenia, Paus. 4.1.6–7, 4.2.6; in Lycia, Hdt. 1.173, Paus. 1.19.4, Steph. Byz. s.v. Lykia; his prophecies, Paus. 10.12.6.
- 131 E.g. Paus. 1.39.4.

15

Theban mythology from Cadmos to Oedipus

The great city of Thebes in southern Boeotia, which ranked with Argos in early mythical history as one of the two most important centres in Greece, was ruled by another of the three main branches of the Inachid family, descended from Europa's brother Cadmos. In this chapter we will trace the mythical history of Thebes from its foundation until the death of Oedipus, before passing on in the next chapter to the culminating episode in its history, the Theban Wars, two conflicts in which the city was attacked by armies that had set out from Argos.

As we have seen, the Inachids were descended from the Argive river-god Inachos, and the family divided into its three main branches after a close descendant of his, **Io**, wandered far away from her native Argos to Egypt. These three branches were descended from her great-grandsons **Belos** and **Agenor** (see p. 216), for while **Danaos**, a son of Belos, returned to his ancestral homeland with his many daughters to become king of Argos, two children of Agenor, **Cadmos**, and **Europa**, became the founders of the Theban and Cretan royal families. It will be remembered that Agenor founded a kingdom in Phoenicia, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and that when his daughter Europa disappeared from the land, he ordered his sons to set off in search of her and not return until they had found her (see pp. 287ff.). No one knew that Europa had in fact been abducted to Crete by Zeus, where she bore Minos to him, the first Inachid king of the island; and her brothers failed without exception in their search and settled abroad in different lands.

Cadmos and the founding of Thebes

Agenor sends Cadmos and his other sons in search of Europa after she is abducted from Phoenicia

To pick up the story of the children of Agenor where we left off in [Chapter 13](#), his four sons Cadmos, Thasos, Cilix, and Phoinix went off in search of Europa. After failing to find her, CILIX settled in the south-eastern province of Asia Minor that was known as Cilicia from that time onwards, while PHOINIX, who was likewise little more than an eponym, settled somewhere near his Phoenician birthplace, or else

went further away to the western reaches of North Africa, an area that was destined to become a main area of Phoenician colonization.¹ We are primarily concerned, however, with the greatest of the brothers, CADMOS, who was accompanied on his search by his brother THASOS and mother TELEPHASSA. After searching through much of the Aegean for Europa without meeting with any success, they finally arrived in Thrace on the northern shores of the sea. When Telephassa died there, Thasos gave up in despair and settled on the island off the Thracian coast that thus came to be known as Thasos. According to Herodotus, the island's famous gold mines were first discovered by the Phoenicians who settled there with him. During the preceding search, Cadmos had already established a Phoenician colony on the island of Thera further south, which would acquire its name from a descendant of his who arrived there many generations later (see p. 283).² After attending to his mother's funeral and bidding farewell to his brother, Cadmos decided to travel to Greece to consult the Delphic oracle about where his sister might be found.³

Before we continue with the story, it should be mentioned that conflicting genealogies are recorded for most members of this family. Europa is quite frequently described as a daughter of Phoinix rather than of Agenor, as is understandable when one considers that she was abducted from Phoenicia. The *Iliad* refers to her as such, as was apparently also the case with the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, which described Phoinix himself as being a son of Agenor, as was commonly agreed thereafter.⁴ We cannot be sure from the surviving evidence whether Cadmos was described as a son of Phoinix too in the *Catalogue*, or as a son of Agenor as usual and thus an uncle of Europa (as is perhaps more likely). He is sometimes classed as a son of Phoinix in other sources in any case. In surviving accounts of the search myth, Cadmos and Europa are always described as brother and sister, and usually as children of Agenor.⁵ Thasos is variously described as a son of Agenor, Phoinix, or Cilix, or of the god Poseidon. Such variations make little practical difference, however. Andromeda's father Cepheus (see p. 227), was usually fitted into this family somewhere or other as a son of Phoinix, Agenor, or Belos, since his 'Ethiopian' kingdom must have been located somewhere on the southern reaches of the Mediterranean, and was sometimes explicitly identified with Phoenicia.⁶

Cadmos follows a cow to the site of Thebes, where he kills a dragon and sows its teeth

Cadmos was told by the Delphic oracle that he should not worry any further about his sister Europa, but should take a cow as his guide, follow it until it sank down exhausted on its right flank (i.e. on the side of good omen), and then found a new city at that spot. He discovered the special cow among the herds of a certain Pelagon, who lived in Phocis somewhere to the east of Delphi. In one version of the story, he was left to discover it by his own devices as he was travelling away from Delphi, and picked out a cow that was walking along on its own among the herds of Pelagon;⁷ or else the oracle was more precise, telling him to seek the herds of Pelagon and then look out for a particular cow that had a white mark resembling a full moon on each of its flanks.⁸ After finding it by whatever means, he followed it as

it ambled eastwards through Phocis and southern Boeotia until it finally sank to the ground at the site of Thebes.

After discovering the location of his city by this means, Cadmos decided to offer the cow in sacrifice to Athena (so inaugurating the Theban cult of Pallas Onca); or else he had been instructed by the oracle to sacrifice the cow to Earth after reaching his goal.⁹ Before he could proceed with the ritual, he needed some lustral water, and sent some of his companions to fetch it from a spring nearby. The spring was sacred to the war-god Ares, however, and was guarded by a fearsome dragon that he had stationed there, which now proceeded to kill all or most of the men. As was usual with Greek dragons, which did not have legs and wings like our modern dragons (which are of medieval design), this creature was pictured as a huge serpent. Some said that it was not merely a servant of Ares, but a son of his, who had been borne to him by Erinys Tilphousa, in one account, an avenging spirit associated with the Theban spring known as Tilphousa.¹⁰ On learning of the fate of his companions, Cadmos set off to confront the dragon, and killed it by stabbing it with his sword or by striking it on the head with a massive stone.¹¹

On the advice of Athena, he collected the dragon's teeth and sowed them in the ground. A host of armed men, known as the SPARTOI or 'Sown Men', sprang up from the teeth and proceeded to fight among themselves until only five were left.¹² They seem to have attacked one another of their own accord in the original story, as a result of their innate aggressiveness, but there was also a quite early version, in which Cadmos threw stones at them out of fear, causing them to fight among themselves in the belief that they were being pelted by one another.¹³ Or, in another quite early version, Cadmos sowed the teeth at the order of Ares, and only five men sprang up from the ground; or in other accounts, Ares himself sowed the teeth, or Athena did.¹⁴ Only five Spartoi sprang up, or were finally left alive, in any case, named Echion, Oudaios, Chthonios, Hyperenor, and Peloros (i.e. Snake-man, Ground-man, Earth-man, Overweening and Monstrous),¹⁵ who went on to found the noble families that would form the military caste of the new city. Before founding the city, Cadmos had to serve Ares for a year (or a great year, equivalent to eight ordinary years) to atone for having killed the dragon.¹⁶ Ares' anger at the killing of the dragon would presumably have been fully allayed by this means in the original legend, but the motif of his anger was too useful not to be reapplied in other connections, whether to account for Cadmos' subsequent transformation into a snake (see p. 336), or the sending of the Sphinx, or the need for an act of self-sacrifice if Thebes was to be defended from the Seven (see p. 366). Although Apollodorus' summary of the foundation legend is drawn from good early sources for the most part, it is misleading in so far as it suggests that Cadmos underwent his servitude to Ares for having killed the Spartoi (rather than the Theban dragon); this unhappy idea can be put aside as an error.¹⁷

The story of the sowing of the dragon's teeth was recycled in Argonautic myth to provide an ordeal for Jason. To account for the origin of the teeth that were sowed by Jason, an event that must have occurred several generations later, it was explained that Cadmos sowed some of the teeth from the Theban dragon, but half of them were held back by Ares and Athena, or Athena alone, to be given to Aietes,

king of Colchis,¹⁸ who later told Jason to sow them in the hope that he would be killed by the dangerous warriors who would spring up from them (see p. 405). Jason threw stones at them accordingly to try to reduce their numbers by provoking them to fight among themselves, whereas Cadmos, who had no interest in killing in them because they would provide him with useful citizens, was said to have hurled the stones in panic, if he did so. If the crucial difference in the circumstances is kept in mind, it can be inferred with some certainty that the motif of the stone throwing originated in Argonautic myth, and that there was thus traffic in both directions between the two bodies of myth.

Cadmos marries the goddess Harmonia and founds the city of Thebes

Ares was reconciled with Cadmos after his servitude was completed, and Zeus granted him a goddess as a wife, namely HARMONIA, the daughter of Ares and Aphrodite. All the Olympian gods descended from heaven to attend the wedding, which was celebrated on the Cadmeia, the acropolis of the new city; and the Muses themselves sang the marriage-hymns, accompanied by Apollo or the Charites (Graces) in some accounts.¹⁹ Many splendid gifts were presented to the bride, most notably a divine necklace and robe (*peplos*), which would be much coveted in future times and become a source of sorrow to their owners. The robe was usually said to have been a gift from Athena, while the necklace, which had naturally been made by Hephaistos, was a present either from her or from Aphrodite. Or else, the necklace was a gift from the bridegroom, who had acquired it either from its maker or from Europa (who had originally received it as a present from Zeus, see p. 288; this latter version, from Pherecydes, departs from the usual tradition by suggesting that Cadmos did in fact meet his sister at some stage after she was abducted to Crete).²⁰ Pindar cites this marriage along with that of Peleus – who married another goddess, Thetis (see p. 430) – as an illustration of the highest blessing that could be attained by a mortal man; but the poet refers to this peak of their good fortune to make a deeper point, that no mortal can expect to live a life that is free from reverses, for Cadmos and Peleus were both destined to meet with their full share of misfortune.²¹ The sorrows of Cadmos arose mainly from the tribulations of his children, as we will see shortly, while Peleus was soon deserted by his wife, who thought it shameful to be yoked to a mortal, and lost his only son prematurely. In his marriage at least, however, Cadmos was indeed very fortunate, for Harmonia's attitude was very different from that of Thetis and the union proved to be happy and long-lasting. Harmonia was described as a mortal woman in some Hellenistic accounts, as a daughter of Zeus by Electra, daughter of Atlas; in that case she was born on the island of Samothrace (like Dardanos, Electra's most notable child, see p. 441), and Cadmos married her there, or abducted her from there, while he was wandering around the Aegean during his search for Europa.²²

Cadmos founded Thebes by building the upper city with the help of the Spartoi, constructing it on the Theban acropolis, which was known as the Cadmeia. Thebes had two separate foundation-legends, since it was sometimes said to have been founded by Zethos and Amphion, who belonged to another family; but the two

legends were reconciled in the usual tradition by means of a division of labour, in which Cadmos was said to have built the upper city, while Zethos and Amphion built or fortified the lower city at a later time (see further on p. 340). The house of Cadmos and bridal-chamber of Harmonia could be seen on the acropolis in historical times, in the form of Mycenaean ruins, as could the spot where the Muses were supposed to have sung during their wedding-feast.²³

The Greeks commonly explained the origin of their alphabet, which was of course of Phoenician origin, by saying that Cadmos had introduced it from Phoenicia. There were rival legends, however, as so often with inventions, and some authors were naturally inclined to ascribe a purely Greek origin to the art of writing by crediting the ever-ingenious Palamedes (see p. 471) with its invention, or Cecrops, a primordial king of Athens.²⁴

The children of Cadmos and Harmonia; the death of Actaion

The founder of Thebes and his divine consort had a single son, Polydoros, and four daughters of far greater importance, Ino, Semele, Agave, and Autonoe.²⁵ **Polydoros** was of genealogical significance alone, as a male heir who could serve to link the founder of the city to the Labdacid dynasty (the family of Oedipus and Polyneices), which would originally have had no connection with Cadmos. As we will see (p. 336), Cadmos and Harmonia also produced a further son, Illyrios, in their later years during the period of their exile.

The disasters that befell the daughters of Cadmos are mostly considered elsewhere. **Semele** provoked her own destruction by making her lover Zeus promise to visit her in his true divine form (see p. 163); she was pregnant at the time with his son Dionysos, who was snatched from her womb and sewn into the thigh of Zeus until it was time for him to be born. **Ino** and her husband Athamas reared the infant Dionysos for a while, much to the anger of Hera, who punished them by sending them mad and so caused the destruction of Ino and her two children (see p. 394). **Agave** married Echion, one of the five Spartoi, and bore him a son Pentheus, who ruled Thebes for a short period as the successor of Cadmos. She and her son were destined to suffer at the hand of Dionysos, who incited her and other Theban women to tear Pentheus to pieces to punish him for having failed to acknowledge his divinity (see pp. 168–9).

Autonoe for her part married a minor rustic god, Aristaios (see p. 146), and bore him a single child, ACTAION, who is remembered for the story of his death. He had a passion for hunting, liking nothing better than to roam through the uplands of Boeotia with a large pack of hounds. He was destined to meet a terrible death, however, while still at a young age, when Artemis turned him into a stag and caused him to be hunted down by his own dogs. In the earliest tradition, she imposed this grim fate on him on behalf of Zeus, because he was courting his aunt Semele, even though she had aroused the desire of Zeus himself (see p. 163). Such is the version of the story that appears in our earliest sources for it, the Hesiodic *Catalogue* and Stesichorus, a poet of the mid-sixth century BC. Pausanias reports rather ambiguously that in the latter poet's account, Artemis 'threw a deerskin around'

Actaion to ensure that his dogs would kill him, and that he would thus be prevented from taking Semele as his wife; but in all probability this is a metaphorical allusion to a standard transformation, as can be found in the corresponding account ascribed to the *Catalogue*.²⁶

Apollodorus quotes some verses, which may have come from the latter poem, giving the names of some of the dogs that devoured Actaion when he was killed at the bidding of Zeus; and he adds another detail that was almost certainly of early origin, saying that Artemis drove the dogs into a frenzy to make them devour Actaion without recognizing who he was, (although one might have supposed that the transformation would in itself have sufficed to ensure that). In some other verses of uncertain origin, again perhaps from the *Catalogue*, we are told that the dogs were subsequently freed from their madness by Zeus, and that they were then overcome with grief for their dead master. Apollodorus describes how they looked everywhere for him, howling all the while, until their search brought them to the cave of the Centaur Cheiron, who allayed their grief by fashioning an image of Actaion.²⁷

The idea that Artemis took this action against Actaion to punish him for an offence committed against herself first appears in Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which it is stated that he was torn apart by his dogs because he had boasted of being a better hunter than she was.²⁸ Or, in another version, he even tried to make love to the virgin goddess when he was dedicating the first fruits of his hunting in her temple.²⁹ In what would become the most favoured version, however, in the later ancient tradition as in modern times, he committed a wholly inadvertent offence against the goddess by stumbling across her while she was bathing in a spring. This version is first attested in Callimachus' fifth hymn, which makes brief reference to the story to draw a comparison with the milder punishment suffered in such circumstances by Teiresias, who was merely blinded when he accidentally saw Athena naked (see p. 365).³⁰ Although it would seem from the way in which the story is handled that it was not of Callimachus' own invention, there is no indication in either the literary or the artistic record that it was of pre-Hellenistic origin. For a full narrative, we can turn, as so often, to Ovid.

While Actaion was hunting one day on Mt Cithairon in southern Boeotia, he entered the thickly wooded Gargaphian valley, which was sacred to Artemis, to try to gain some relief from the midday heat. As ill fortune would have it, Artemis had come there with the same intent, and he came across her as she was bathing in a shady spring with her attendant nymphs. The angry goddess threw some water into his face, exclaiming that he could now tell everyone that he had seen her naked, if he was capable of doing so. The meaning of her words became apparent when horns began to sprout from his head where the water had struck him, and he then turned progressively into a deer. He retained the full use of his mind, however, and fully appreciated what was happening to him when he saw his changing features reflected in a pool. When he then came to be hunted down by his dogs, he was unable to call out to them to let them know that he was their master, and as they proceeded to tear him apart, he filled the heights with groans, which, while not fully human, were such as no deer would be capable of uttering.³¹

Actaion's parents were grief-stricken to learn of the death of their only son, and

his father Aristaios left Boeotia forever, as a consequence, to settle on the island of Ceos (see p. 336), while Autonoe went away to the Boeotian village of the same name, where her tomb could be seen in historical times.³²

The exile and ultimate fate of Cadmos and Harmonia

Towards the end of their life, Cadmos and Harmonia left Thebes to live in exile in Illyria, a wild region adjoining the Adriatic in the north-west.³³ Whatever the original significance of this feature of their legend, it could easily be explained that their departure was prompted by the many troubles of their family.³⁴ It was commonly said that Cadmos abdicated in his old age in favour of his grandson Pentheus, the son of Agave, but remained in Thebes until his successor brought further disaster on the family by opposing Dionysos and his orgiastic rites (see p. 168);³⁵ after Pentheus met a grisly death as a consequence, Cadmos and Harmonia departed out of despair (or at the bidding of Dionysos), leaving the kingdom in the hands of Polydoros, their only son. They travelled to Illyria in a cart drawn by two yoked oxen (hence the name of the town of Bouthoe in Illyria, which was supposedly founded by Cadmos and was named as such because he and his wife had been drawn there swiftly, *thoōs*, by oxen, *bous*).³⁶ Two stories were put forwards to explain how Cadmos came to win a kingdom for himself in his new homeland. According to Apollodorus, a war was in progress at the time between the Illyrians and the neighbouring Encheleans or ‘Eel-people’, who were advised by an oracle that they would defeat the Illyrians if they took Cadmos and Harmonia as their leaders; and after the Illyrians were duly vanquished, Cadmos was able to establish himself as their ruler.³⁷ Or, in a less creditable tale that is briefly reported by Hyginus, Cadmos was accompanied to Illyria by his daughter Agave, who married Lycotherses, king of the Illyrians, and murdered him soon afterwards to secure the throne for her father. Cadmos and Harmonia produced a late-born son, ILLYRIOS, who gave his name to the land and became the ancestor of its ruling family.³⁸

Their story takes a strange turn towards the end of their life in some accounts, for there was a tradition that suggested that they were turned into snakes. The story of their metamorphosis first appears in Euripides’ *Bacchae* and resurfaces in Hellenistic sources. Dionysos informs Cadmos of his future fate in Euripides’ play, forewarning that he and his wife will undergo this transformation (apparently as part of the punishment that the god inflicts on the family to avenge Pentheus’ rejection of his rites). Although there is no direct reference to their Illyrian exile, doubtless because there is a gap in the text immediately before, the god goes on to say that they will sack many cities at the head of a barbarian army, driven in an ox-cart, until the attackers meet with disaster after plundering the oracle of Apollo. These barbarians are plainly Cadmos’ new Illyrian subjects, and we know from Herodotus that there was a tradition that some Encheleans and Illyrians had once met with destruction when they had attacked Apollo’s temple at Delphi (a story that would probably have had no connection with Cadmos originally). Quite the oddest feature in this account is the suggestion that the couple will already be in snake-form while leading the barbarian army, a notion that might be hard to credit if it were not clearly indicated

in Cadmos' response that this is exactly what Dionysos had meant.³⁹ According to the Hellenistic poet Nicander, they lived in reptilian form ever afterwards in the Illyrian province of Drileos, creeping around as a pair of fearsome snakes. Hyginus suggests that they were transformed at the will of Ares because Cadmos had killed his scared dragon.⁴⁰ In the fullest surviving narrative, Ovid sets the stage for the transformation by describing how the couple, who are both bowed down with age even though Harmonia was a goddess, once came to reflect on their many misfortunes during their disconsolate old age in Illyria. Cadmos suggests that Ares may have visited them with their sufferings to avenge his killing of the sacred serpent at Thebes, and prays that he himself may become a serpent if that is indeed the case. Even while he is speaking, his body begins to lengthen, and his skin to harden and darken and to grow a covering of scales; and as his familiar form and features disappear, Harmonia prays to share his fate. They are now a pair of harmless reptiles that neither fear nor injure human beings because they remember what they once were.⁴¹

In spite of her divine status, Harmonia was thought to have shared a common end with her husband, it being generally accepted that they were transferred to Elysion or the Isles of the Blessed (homes for the privileged dead in the upper world, see pp. 104–5). Pindar mentions Cadmos, together with Peleus and Achilles, among those who have been granted the privilege of living in the Isles of the Blessed, as would be a fitting end for a notable hero who was married to a goddess; Menelaos is told similarly in the *Odyssey* that he will be transferred to Elysion by the gods because he is a son-in-law of Zeus.⁴² In a report that is vaguely ascribed to 'the poets and mythographers', a Pindaric scholion states that Cadmos and Harmonia were conveyed to the Elysian Fields on a chariot drawn by winged dragons.⁴³ There is not necessarily any conflict between this idea and that of their transformation. Dionysos foretells in the *Bacchae* that Ares will finally settle them in the Isles of the Blessed, and Apollodorus states that they were turned into snakes and sent to the Elysian Fields by Zeus.⁴⁴ Although it is sometimes assumed that they were sent to their final home while still in snake form, that is not directly stated.

Regents and interlopers

The early Labdacids, and the Theban careers of Lycos and Nycteus

POLYDOROS, son of Cadmos, who succeeded to the throne after the brief and unfortunate reign of Pentheus, is hardly more than a name; for, as was noted above, he was of genealogical significance alone as the link who served to tie the Theban dynasty of the Labdacids to the founder Cadmos. According to the unified genealogical scheme that was developed through this linkage, Polydoros was the father of Labdacos, the eponymous founder of the Labdacid dynasty, which included Oedipus and his warring sons Polyneices and Eteocles among its members. Polydoros is first mentioned as the son of Cadmos in the *Theogony* (though not in a part of the poem that can be ascribed to Hesiod himself), and then in Herodotus and tragedy.⁴⁵

From what is reported by Pausanias and Apollodorus, the family history of Polydoros and his immediate descendants can be summarized as follows. Polydoros married Nycteis, the daughter of Nycteus, a man who had come in from elsewhere with his brother Lycos and had established good relations with the royal family, and she bore him a single son, LABDACOS. Since Labdacos was still an infant when Polydoros fell fatally ill, he entrusted his young son and throne to his brother-in-law Nycteus, inviting him to rule for the present as regent. When Nycteus came to die in his turn, in circumstances that will be described on p. 339, he transferred this charge to his brother Lycos, who duly transferred power to Labdacos when he came of age. Only a single story is recorded of Labdacos as a ruler, that he became embroiled in a border-war with his southern neighbour, Pandion, king of Athens, who defeated him with the aid of a Thracian ally, Tereus (see p. 322). Otherwise we have only an elliptical statement by Apollodorus, who remarks that he perished because he was of like mind to Pentheus, which would suggest that he met a premature end because he tried to oppose Dionysos. Since his son LAIOS was only a year old at the time of his death, Lycos assumed power in Thebes once again, ruling on behalf of Laios as regent (or else taking advantage of the situation to seize power for himself). Lycos then presided over the city for many years until he was killed (or driven out) by his great-nephews Zethos and Amphion, who established themselves as joint kings and forced Laios to depart into exile. Laios took refuge at the court of Pelops in the western Peloponnese, where he remained until he was finally able to secure his rightful throne after the death of the usurpers; and with the story of the birth and exposure of his son Oedipus, we enter in to familiar territory.⁴⁶

The mythical history of Thebes during this period, in the form in which it came to be systematized by the mythographers, thus follows a rather peculiar pattern. The Labdacids themselves, as the successive rulers of the native ruling dynasty, are colourless figures until Oedipus arrives on the scene as a descendant of Cadmos in the fourth generation, whereas almost all of the memorable stories and important myths were with men from outside who ruled in their stead for much of the time, whether as regents or as usurpers. So, we must concentrate on these outsiders for the present, before returning to Laios and the story of how his son Oedipus came to be born.

According to the usual tradition, LYCOS and NYCTEUS were born in Hyria, another Boeotian town of far less significance than Thebes, set on the east coast of the province facing the island of Euboea. They were sons of Hyrieus, the eponymous founder of the city, who fathered them by a nymph called Clonie. Hyrieus was fitted into the Atlantid genealogies (see p. 440) by being classed as a son of Alcyone, daughter of Atlas, but that is of little significance in the present context. An alternative genealogy in which the two brothers were described as sons of Chthonios, one of the Spartoi or Sown Men, was almost certainly of later origin, and was presumably devised at Thebes to provide the interlopers with proper Theban descent. After growing up in Hyria, the brothers decided to seek their fortune in the great city of Thebes, arriving there during the reign of Pentheus. As a result of their friendship with the king, they were readily accepted as honoured citizens, and Lycos was eventually elected to a position of considerable power as the polemarch

(military commander) of the city. Nycteus had two daughters, Nycteïs, who married Polydoros as we have seen, and Antiope, whose troubled life will be considered in the next section. Lycos married a woman called Dirce, whom we will meet on p. 339, as the cruel stepmother of Antiope, but he is not reported to have fathered any children by her.⁴⁷

Antiope, daughter of Nycteus, and her twin sons Zethos and Amphion

ANTIOPE was a figure of some importance in myth from a very early period, both in her own right and as the mother of Zethos and Amphion, the founders of the main city of Thebes. In the earliest tradition, as recorded in the *Odyssey*, she was a daughter of the river-god Asopos, and evidently had no connection as yet with Nycteus by birth or otherwise.⁴⁸ The Asopos of which her father was the god was properly the small Boeotian river of that name, rather than the Peloponnesian river associated with the important Asopid family that will be considered in [Chapter 19](#) (see pp. 425ff.). If this genealogy is accepted, Antiope's family history could not have followed the course described below; and in the *Odyssey*, her sons Zethos and Amphion are in fact presented as the original founders of Thebes rather than as interlopers who seized power there as a result of conflicts within their own family.⁴⁹ We cannot be sure when Antiope first came to be described as the daughter of Nycteus, and the following family history came to be developed in accord with that; although such descent is not attested for her by any author earlier than Euripides, it seems more likely than not that the Hesiodic *Catalogue* classed her as an Atlantid rather than as a daughter of Asopos.

She bore her only children, the twins ZETHOS and AMPHION, to Zeus, as is already stated in the *Odyssey*. In the *Antiope*, a lost play by Euripides, the circumstances of their birth were described as follows. Approaching Antiope in the guise of a Satyr, Zeus raped her and caused her to become pregnant; and she then fled to Sicyon, on the far side of the Gulf of Corinth, to escape the anger of her father, as he threatened her with punishment or even with death. After meeting her by chance in Sicyon, the local ruler, Epopeus, took her home and invited her to become his wife. Nycteus was so upset by this course of events that he soon died, but not before he had made his brother Lycos swear to exact vengeance on Antiope. Lycos, who succeeded him as ruler of Thebes, duly marched against Sicyon after his death, killed Epopeus, and brought Antiope back to Thebes as a captive. During the journey, when they had reached Eleutheraï in southern Boeotia, Antiope gave birth to Zethos and Amphion, the twin sons whom she had conceived to Zeus, and exposed them on Mt Cithairon; but they were rescued, as is customary in myths of this kind, by a shepherd, who conferred their names on them.

Once Antiope was back in Thebes, she was handed over to Dirce, the wife of Lycos, who cruelly mistreated her. When the opportunity arose, however, she took flight and went in search of her sons, who had been reared by the shepherd in the meantime on the slopes of Mt Cithairon, on the southern border of Boeotia; but Zethos mistook her for a runaway slave, and refused to accept her as his mother. Meanwhile, Dirce happened to pass by while roaming the hills as a Bacchant, and

caught sight of Antiope and dragged her way with the intention of killing her. But now having learned from the shepherd that she really was their mother, her sons rushed off in pursuit of her and rescued her from Dirce. To avenge Dirce's mistreatment of their mother, they tied her to a bull by her long hair and so caused her death. Although they then travelled to Thebes with the intention of killing Lycos in his turn, Hermes forbade it and ordered Lycos to surrender the throne to Amphion.

Such was Euripides' account, as summarized by Hyginus,⁵⁰ and the story is recounted in much the same way by Apollodorus, who adds that Zethos devoted himself to cattle-rearing while being brought up in the countryside, whereas Amphion practiced singing to the lyre, having been given a lyre by Hermes.⁵¹ The contrast that is indicated here in their character was an important feature of the tradition, as we will see. Apollodorus also reports that Nycteus killed himself in his despondency over his daughter, and that Antiope's bonds untied themselves of their own accord at the time of her escape, evidently through divine intervention.

Pausanias records a different version of these events from the Sicyonian tradition, in which Epopeus abducted Antiope from Thebes (perhaps after she rejected an offer of marriage from him) while her father Nycteus was acting as regent for Labdacos. Nycteus marched against Sicyon as a consequence, but Epopeus gained the upper hand even though he was wounded in battle, and he inflicted a fatal wound on Nycteus and forced the Thebans to withdraw. While lying on his death-bed, after being brought back to Thebes, Nycteus transferred the regency to his brother and asked him to launch an even larger expedition against Sicyon to exact vengeance on Epopeus; and for less obvious reasons, he also asked him to punish Antiope if he could catch her (perhaps because she had colluded in her own abduction). As events turned out, Lycos had no occasion to resort to force, since Epopeus had died in the meantime and his successor was willing to surrender Antiope. She gave birth to her sons at Eleutherai during the return journey as above; it would seem that she had been seduced and rendered pregnant by Zeus before the time of her abduction.⁵²

There was a spring of Dirce near Thebes, which was originally associated with a nymph of that name, who is addressed in flattering terms by a chorus in Euripides' *Bacchae*;⁵³ but it also came to be believed that the spring owed its name to the evil stepmother of this legend, and it was suggested accordingly that her body was thrown into the stream that flowed from it, or that her ashes were scattered into it, or indeed that her blood or body were transformed to give rise to its waters.⁵⁴

In addition to a more orthodox account, Hyginus records a curious version of Antiope's story, in which she was initially married to her uncle Lycos. He cast her aside, however, to marry Dirce instead after she was raped by Epopeus in unspecified circumstances. Dirce subsequently came to suspect that her husband had been sleeping with Antiope (presumably after noticing that she had become pregnant, as the result of a liaison with Zeus), and kept her chained up in the dark; but Zeus contrived that she should escape when her pregnancy reached full term, and she took flight and brought her sons to birth on Mt Cithairon. They then survived to exact revenge on Dirce, as in the usual tradition.⁵⁵ Hyginus consistently refers to the king of Sicyon as Epaphos, rather than Epopeus, but this is plainly no

more than an error.

Pausanias offers a brief account of the subsequent life of Antiope. Since Dirce had honoured Dionysos above all other gods, he was greatly angered by her death and drove Antiope mad, causing her to wander through Greece in a state of frenzy. She was eventually rescued from this fate, however, by Phocos, son of Ornytion, who cured her of her madness (presumably by means of purificatory rites), married her and settled down with her at Tithorea in northern Phocis (some ten miles north-east of Delphi). Along with Phocos, son of Aiacos, this present Phocos, who was a grandson of Sisypchos from Corinth, was one of the two eponyms of the small province of Phocis (see p. 427). The joint grave of Phocos and Antiope could be seen at Tithorea in historical times. Each year, when the sun was in the constellation of the Bull (Taurus), the Tithoreans would attempt to steal some earth from the burial mound of Zethos and Amphion at Thebes to place it on that of Antiope; for a prophecy had revealed that their crops would thrive if they could do so, while those of the Thebans would fail.⁵⁶

The reign of Zethos and Amphion, and the massacre of the Niobids

By killing or expelling Lycos and displacing the young Labdacid heir Laios, who was either already in exile or was smuggled out by his supporters, Zethos and Amphion established themselves as the joint rulers of Thebes. They then proceeded to extend and fortify the city, by building the lower city below the citadel, known as the Cadmeia, which had been established by Cadmos, and by encircling the whole city with magnificent walls with seven gates, the famous walls that figure so prominently in the legend of the Seven against Thebes (see pp. 352ff.).⁵⁷ As the archaeological evidence indicates, the original Mycenaean wall would have enclosed the Cadmeia, and the outer wall was built much later; but although the Mycenaean wall would doubtless have been a very imposing structure, it seems altogether unlikely that it would have had as many as seven gates, and there is nothing in the topography of the site to suggest why there should have been more than three or four. This feature of the story may thus be regarded as a product of the mythical imagination.

Each of the brothers contributed as best he could to the building-work, Zethos relying on his practical skills and brute strength while Amphion exploited his skills as a musician by singing so enchantingly to his lyre that the stones followed him to their correct positions of their own accord. The musical powers of Amphion are described in similar terms to those of Orpheus (see p. 565). This was probably a fairly ancient feature of his legend, even if it is not mentioned in the relevant passage in the *Odyssey*, since the *Europeia* (an early epic ascribed to the Corinthian poet Eumelos) is reported to have stated that Hermes taught Amphion to play the lyre, as the first mortal to possess that skill, and that stones and animals were drawn to him when he sang to it. It was definitely stated by Euripides in the *Antiope*, in any case, that Amphion made use of this power to help in the building of the walls. Most subsequent authors agree that he acquired his lyre from Hermes, (although Pherecydes said that it was a gift from the Muses, and some later sources suggest that it was given to him by Apollo or Zeus).⁵⁸ Zethos was traditionally presented as

being of opposite character to his brother, as a practical man who devoted himself to cattle-breeding and the arts of war, and Euripides developed this idea in his *Antiope* by portraying the brothers as proponents of two contrasting ways of life, the practical and the contemplative, and by having them debate the value of each in a more or less philosophical manner.⁵⁹

According to the standard tradition in classical and later times, as followed in the preceding narrative, Cadmos founded Thebes in the first place by building the upper city on the acropolis, while Zethos and Amphion became its second founders by fortifying (and perhaps constructing) the lower city, while the legitimate Cadmeian heir was temporarily excluded. A pattern of this kind might seem to suggest that there were two separate foundation myths that needed to be reconciled; and it is in fact the case that there are accounts from the early tradition, in which Zethos and Amphion are presented as the original founders. As already mentioned, the *Odyssey* presented them as such, saying that they 'first founded the seat of seven-gated Thebes and fortified it with walls, for they could not live in spacious Thebes without the defence of walls, mighty though they were'. The early mythographer Pherecydes expands on the latter point by saying that the brothers built the walls to protect themselves against some specific enemies, the Phlegyans (a mythical people of Central Greece who were notorious for their violence and rapacity, see p. 559); the city was conquered nonetheless after their death by Eurymachos, king of the Phlegyans, who laid waste to it, leaving it deserted until Cadmos arrived at a later period and refounded it. It will be noted that this account reconciles the two foundation myths, but by adopting the opposite strategy to that generally adopted in the later tradition, by making Cadmos the second founder.⁶⁰

Amphion married NIOBE, the daughter of Tantalos from Asia Minor (see p. 419), who bore him numerous sons and daughters, from seven to ten of each in most accounts. As has already been mentioned (see p. 141), Niobe was so proud of her large family that she boasted that she had many more children than the goddess Leto, who had two alone, Artemis and Apollo. Leto was so offended that she called on her children to exact vengeance, and they proceeded to kill all the Niobids without exception, Artemis shooting the female children and Apollo the males. In her grief at their death, Niobe left her husband and returned to her original homeland in Lydia, where she was turned to stone (see p. 142).⁶¹ Amphion was also said to have met his death as a result of these events, either because he was killed in the course of the massacre, or because he stabbed himself in his sorrow, or because he was shot by Apollo while he was trying to storm the god's temple (evidently in anger at the fate of his children).⁶² According to a tradition that can be traced back to the fifth century BC, two of the children, Amyclas and Meliboia, survived the massacre. They were spared because they prayed to Leto for mercy, so Pausanias tells us, and they went away to Argos, where they founded the city's sanctuary of Leto in gratitude for their escape. Since Meliboia had been so frightened that she turned pale (*chloris*) and remained so ever afterwards, she now came to be known as Chloris.⁶³ Under that name she won the foot-race at the first Heraian Games (the women's games at Olympia) after they were founded by Hippodameia as a thank-offering for her marriage to Pelops (see p. 420).⁶⁴

Zethos for his part married Thebe, a daughter of the river-god Asopos (see p. 435) and the eponym of Thebes,⁶⁵ or else, according to a more ancient tradition, AEDON (Nightingale), daughter of Pandareos. The early mythographer Pherecydes recounts how Aedon grew jealous of Niobe for having so many children while she had only two, Itylos and Nais, and tried to kill her eldest son Alalcomeneus, but accidentally killed her own son Itylos instead, mistaking him in the dark for her intended victim. When Poinē (Vengeance personified) was then sent against her by Zeus, she prayed to be transformed into a bird, and Zeus turned her into a nightingale. This story was cited to explain a passage in the *Odyssey* in which the daughter of Pandareos, is said to sing sweetly as a nightingale of the greenwood (*chlōreis aēdōn*), as she laments for her beloved child Itylos, son of Zethos, whom she had accidentally killed with a sword.⁶⁶ This mythical account of the origin of the nightingale and its sorrowful song was largely displaced in the subsequent tradition by another story associated with the Attic legend of Tereus and Procne (see p. 322). According to Pausanias, this episode also provoked the death of Zethos, who died of grief after learning that his wife had murdered his son.⁶⁷

The tragic history of Oedipus

Laios recovers his rightful throne, and exposes his son Oedipus

After the death of Zethos and Amphion, the legitimate ruler of the city, LAIOS, son of Labdacos, was able to return to reclaim his inheritance. He had been living in Elis in the north-western Peloponnese in the meantime, as a guest of Pelops, king of Pisa. Although he was of significance above all for the part that he played in the story of his son Oedipus, a tale also came to be ascribed to him in connection with the time of his exile. While teaching the art of chariot-driving to CHRYSIPPOS, a young illegitimate son of Pelops, he conceived a passion for him and carried him off with the intention of seducing him; but Chrysippos repulsed him and killed himself with his sword out of shame.⁶⁸ Some explained the subsequent misfortunes of the Labdacids by saying that Pelops cursed the entire family on hearing of the fate of Chrysippos; and in one account at least, the Sphinx was said to have been sent against Thebes by the marriage-goddess Hera to punish the Thebans for failing to take action against Laios.⁶⁹ This tale of the abduction of Chrysippos was recounted in some form in the lost *Chrysippos* of Euripides; but there was also a conflicting tale, which was at least as old, and probably more so, in which Chrysippos was said to have been murdered by two of his half-brothers (see p. 422). Some authors tried to reconcile the two traditions by suggesting that Pelops recovered his lost son by force and brought him back to Pisa, where he was subsequently murdered by members of his own family.⁷⁰

Laios married JOCASTA (properly Iocaste in Greek), who belonged to a side-branch of the Theban royal family, as a daughter of Menoiceus and sister of Creon. She was destined to become both the mother and the wife of Oedipus. The *Odyssey* diverges from the usual tradition, however, by naming Oedipus' mother as

Epicastē.⁷¹ When Jocasta initially failed to produce any children, Laios consulted the Delphic oracle, which warned him to abandon any thought of fathering a child since he would be killed by his son if he should have one. Although he kept out of his wife's bed for a time, he had intercourse with her one night while he was flushed with wine, causing her to conceive the fateful son. Soon after the child was born, Laios handed him over to a shepherd to be exposed, first thrusting a spike through his feet to ensure that he would not be recovered and reared, hence his name of OEDIPUS (properly OIDIPOUS in Greek) or 'Swell-foot'. In the most familiar account of these events, the shepherd (sometimes named as Euphorbos or Phorbos) was told to place him out to die on Mt Cithairon on the southern borders of Boeotia. Cithairon was also used as summer pasture by the Corinthians, and the shepherd felt such pity for the child that he handed him over to one of his Corinthian colleagues, who took him away to his master Polybos, the king of Corinth. Since Polybos and his wife Merope (or Periboia, or Medousa) had no children of their own, they decided to raise Oedipus as their own son. Or, in a slightly different version, Oedipus was exposed on the mountain, as Laios had ordered, but was discovered and rescued by some Corinthians, who took him to their king.⁷² According to a less favoured tradition, Laios sent the child out to sea in a chest, but he was washed ashore safely at Corinth, or else at Sicyon, the next main city to the west. Oedipus was then reared in the royal household as usual; according to Hyginus, who does not specify the location, the queen, Periboia, discovered the child while she was washing clothes by the shore.⁷³

There were also accounts in which Oedipus is said to have been conveyed to Sicyon rather than to Corinth after being recovered by a shepherd or herdsman.⁷⁴ The king who reared him is named as Polybos irrespective of where he ruled. It seems likely that the Sicyonian Polybos, who was remembered for having offered refuge to Adrastus when he was exiled from Argos (see p. 354), was Oedipus' foster-father in the original tradition, while the Corinthian version was secondary. It seems telling that Polybos cannot be fitted into the Sisyphid ruling line at Corinth (see pp. 553ff.), and no genealogy is offered for him in that connection; the Sicyonian Polybos is said to have been a son of Hermes by Chthonophyle, daughter of Sicyon.⁷⁵ There was no such unanimity with regard to the name of the foster-mother of Oedipus, for Sophocles calls her Merope, while Apollodorus and Hyginus call her Periboia, and other authors, Medousa or Antiochis.⁷⁶ Although Polybos is fully aware that the child is a foundling in Sophocles' account, the queen was sometimes said to have passed him off as a child of their marriage without her husband being aware of his true origin.⁷⁷

Oedipus kills his father and wins the Theban throne by solving the riddle of the Sphinx

When Oedipus came of age, he set off for Delphi to enquire about his origins. According to Sophocles in *Oedipus the King*, he became concerned about the matter after he was taunted at a banquet by a drunken guest who accused him of not being a true son of Polybos. Although the king and queen tried to reassure him, the

rumours persisted and the matter continued to trouble him until he decided to consult the Delphic oracle without the knowledge of his putative parents. The god at Delphi offered no response to him on the point in question, but revealed instead that he was destined to kill his father, and then to marry his own mother and to father children by her. Assuming that the oracle was referring to Polybos and Merope, he resolved to stay away from his former home forever, and set off in the direction of Thebes. As he was approaching a point on his route where three roads ran together, he happened to meet an old man who was travelling by cart in the opposite direction accompanied by five attendants. When the herald who was proceeding at the head of the group tried to force him off the road, Oedipus struck back at him and continued on his way; but as he was passing the cart, the old man hit him on the head with his ox-goad. Not realizing that the stranger was his own father, Oedipus reacted by dealing him a fatal blow with his staff, and then set out to kill the other members of the group (although one of them escaped undetected). Without discovering anything further about his victims, he then resumed his journey and travelled on to Thebes.⁷⁸

In the rather different account in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, Oedipus encountered Laios at a point where their paths ran together as both of them were heading for Delphi, Oedipus to enquire about his parentage, and Laios to ask whether his exposed son was truly dead. Laios' charioteer ordered Oedipus to stand out of the way of the king, but the proud youth ignored him and killed the old man when his feet were trampled by the advancing chariot-horses. He then seized the chariot and drove it back to Corinth to present it to Polybos, apparently without ever reaching Delphi.⁷⁹ This version, in which both parties were travelling in the same direction, may well have been the earlier form of the story, for it would explain why the confrontation took place where different roads ran together. The incident was supposed to have occurred at a site in Phocis called the Cleft Way (*schistē hodos*), where the road from Lebadeia (and thence from Thebes) was joined by a more northerly road from Daulis before ascending through a mountain valley to Delphi.⁸⁰

Since Laios had no children apart from the son whom he had exposed, the throne passed to the senior member of another branch of the royal family, CREON, son of Menoiceus. The Thebans began to be troubled soon afterwards by a fearsome monster, the SPHINX (Throttler), a winged creature with the body of a lion and the head of a woman, of a type familiar enough in Near Eastern art. Hesiod classes her as a child of Orthos and Chimaira (see p. 57), and refers to her as 'the deadly Phix that brought destruction to the Cadmeians'; in view of Hesiod's Boeotian origin and later reports that state that the monster sat on Mt Phicion outside Thebes, it would appear that Phix was a local Boeotian form of her name. According to her usual legend, she would set a riddle for passers-by and would kill them if they were unable to solve it, but was fated to meet her own death if anyone should provide the correct solution. There is reason to suppose, however, that she may simply have carried away young Thebans without posing any question in the earliest tradition. Sophocles is the first author to state unequivocally that she posed a riddle (although this already seems to be indicated in a brief fragment from Pindar).⁸¹ Since it is characteristic of local monsters of this kind to appear on the scene without need for explanation, it is hardly surprising that there was no settled tradition on why the

Sphinx should have arrived to plague Thebes. Some mythographers, as we have seen, connected her arrival with Laios' abduction of Chrysippos (see p. 342); in that case she was sent by Hera, but there was also an account in which she was sent by Dionysos for some unstated reason (perhaps because Pentheus had opposed his rites).⁸²

When the Sphinx proceeded to kill one Theban after another, including the king's son Haimon in some accounts,⁸³ Creon finally grew so desperate that he offered the kingdom and the hand of the former queen, Jocasta, to anyone who could rid the city of this terror. Either in the hope of winning this reward, or by chance while he was seeking a new home in exile, Oedipus now arrived at Thebes and provided the correct answer to the riddle of the Sphinx (see [Figure 15.1](#)). This riddle, which has been recorded in comparable forms in many parts of the world, asked what single being is four-footed, two-footed and three-footed. In its traditional form, as recorded in some hexameter verses, which probably originated in Attic tragedy (or possibly early epic), it ran as follows:



[Figure 15.1](#). The young Oedipus ponders the riddle of the Sphinx. Red-figured Greek vase circa 470 BC. © Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy Stock Photo.

There is a being on earth that is four-footed, two-footed and three-footed, yet has a single voice; and of all beings that move on the ground or through the air or sea, it alone changes its form; and when it moves with the support of the most feet, then is the speed of its limbs at the weakest.⁸⁴

Oedipus inferred that the riddle refers to man, who crawls on all fours as an infant, walks upright on two legs when grown up, and employs a stick as a third foot in old age. When her secret was revealed to all and sundry by the newcomer, the Sphinx took her own life by hurling herself from the Theban acropolis or from a cliff outside the city, or else surrendered herself to Oedipus to be killed.⁸⁵

The unholy marriage of Oedipus and his downfall

In the account familiar from tragedy and the later tradition, Oedipus claimed JOCASTA, the wife of the late king, along with the kingdom as his reward for ridding Thebes of the Sphinx, and lived with her for a long period, fathering two daughters by her, Antigone and Ismene, and two quarrelsome sons, Polyneices and Eteocles; but when the truth about his birth and his father's death finally came to be revealed, Jocasta hanged herself, and Oedipus blinded himself and then abdicated the throne to depart into exile.⁸⁶ Early epic accounts seem to have followed a different pattern, however, presenting Oedipus as having remained on the throne after the revelations (here made quite soon after his accession), and as having subsequently married a second wife who became the mother of his children. Odysseus refers to his continuing rule in the *Odyssey* when describing how he saw the dead mother of Oedipus in Hades:

I saw the mother of Oidipodes, the beautiful Epicaste, who did a dreadful deed in the ignorance of her mind by marrying her own son, who wedded her after killing his father; but the gods soon made these things known to men. But he, through the cruel counsels of the gods, reigned on over the Cadmeians in lovely Thebes suffering woes, while she went down to the house of Hades, the mighty keeper of the gates, fastening the deadly noose to the roof of the lofty hall in the stress of her grief; but to him she left behind many sorrows, all that a mother's Erinyes (Furies) can bring to pass.⁸⁷

The *Iliad* reports, furthermore, that funeral games were held for Oedipus at Thebes after he had fallen (apparently in battle),⁸⁸ which would indicate that he was an honoured ruler at the time of his death. Since Oedipus continued to rule at Thebes in this version of his story, the sorrows that are ascribed to him in the *Odyssey* could hardly be related to any blinding or exile as in the later tradition; one should perhaps suppose that the poet was referring above all to the hostility that arose between Oedipus and his sons, which is known to have been a central feature of his story in early epic (see p. 352). He would doubtless have been troubled by regret and conscience too. By saying that the gods soon (*aphar*) made his transgression known,⁸⁹ Homer certainly seems to indicate that this must have happened fairly swiftly before Oedipus would have had time to father several children by the incestuous marriage. In the *Oedipodeia*, the relevant epic in the Theban cycle, Oedipus took a second wife after the revelations, marrying Euryganeia, daughter of Hyperphas, who bore him the four children who are borne to him by Jocasta in tragic and later sources; and this may well have been the accepted tradition in early epic.⁹⁰

Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* is the earliest surviving source for the story that

Oedipus fathered his four children by his own mother, and that he blinded himself after discovering that he had killed his father and married his mother.⁹¹ This was the third play in a trilogy first produced in 467 BC, of which the preceding *Laïos* and *Oedipus* (which would have given a full account of the hero's career) are now lost; it is not known whether Oedipus went into exile in Aeschylus' version (most likely not). The dominant account of the fall of Oedipus was established once and for all in a tragedy that was composed half a century or more later, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, which related the story as follows.

After Oedipus had reigned at Thebes as a highly respected sovereign for many years, the city was struck by a terrible plague, and he dispatched Creon to Delphi to enquire about a cure; and when the oracle declared that the epidemic would be brought to an end if the murderer of Laïos were killed or at least expelled, the king set to work to discover who this might be. He publicly cursed the guilty man, and proclaimed that anyone who could help to identify him should step forwards, and ordered furthermore that no one should offer him shelter or have anything to do with him, whoever he might be.⁹² When he then interrogated Teiresias, the seer tried to keep silent initially, but indicated under pressure that Oedipus himself was the man who was polluting the land, and that he was therefore searching for himself. At this point, however, his words made no impression on Oedipus, who simply accused him of having accepted bribes from Creon to jeopardize his position.⁹³ On hearing of this, Creon came to the palace to protest, and became embroiled in a bitter argument with the king; but Jocasta persuaded them to separate after overhearing their raised voices, and questioned Oedipus about the cause of the quarrel after Creon had left. When she was told that Teiresias had accused her husband of having committed the murder, she tried to reassure him by arguing that prophecies are not to be trusted, at least to judge by the oracle that had been delivered to Laïos about his son (whom she naturally supposed to be dead), and by asserting furthermore that Oedipus could hardly have been responsible for the death of Laïos, since he had been killed abroad by brigands at a place where three roads ran together. Far from being reassured, however, Oedipus was alarmed by what she said about the crossroads, for he himself had once killed an aged man at a crossroads. Beginning to suspect for the first time that there might be something in the seer's words, he questioned Jocasta further, only to find that his fears were confirmed. On learning that she had been informed of the details of the incident by an attendant of Laïos who had escaped and was now living in the countryside outside the city, Oedipus ordered that he should be fetched.⁹⁴

While this was being arranged, a messenger arrived from Corinth to report that the citizens had invited Oedipus to rule over them as the successor of his putative father, Polybos, who had died of sickness and old age during his absence. If Polybos had really been his father, this meant that Oedipus could not have been guilty of the death of his father, and he initially found some relief in that thought; but it so happened that the messenger was the shepherd who had first brought him to Polybos as a baby after receiving him from the Theban shepherd who had been sent to expose him; and when this was revealed by the Corinthian, Jocasta realized who her husband must be, and went off into the palace on her own to kill herself.⁹⁵ It

happened that the attendant of Laios who had been summoned by the king was the very person who had taken him out for exposure, and when he confirmed the truth of the Corinthian's words on his arrival, Oedipus was at last compelled to recognize the truth about his origins and about his subsequent life. He rushed into the palace to discover that Jocasta had hanged herself; and tearing the brooches from her clothing, one in each hand, he gouged out his eyes with the brooch-pins.⁹⁶

There were inevitably accounts from tragedy and elsewhere that differed from that of Sophocles. In Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, for instance, Jocasta is still alive at the time of the first Theban War, and commits suicide at that later time after her two sons have killed one another in the course of that conflict.⁹⁷ Although little has survived of Euripides' *Oedipus*, it is known that Oedipus was blinded by the servants of Laios in that play, apparently after it was discovered that he had killed Laios but before it became known that Laios was his father.⁹⁸ Hyginus records a version in which Oedipus' foster-mother Periboia came to Thebes after the death of her husband Polybos and revealed that Oedipus had been no more than an adoptive son; and when the man who had exposed him then recognized from the scars on his feet and ankles that he was the son of Laios, Oedipus blinded himself with the brooches from his mother's dress as in Sophocles' account, and departed into exile with his daughter Antigone.⁹⁹

A rather different account of Oedipus' downfall, which may perhaps be of early origin is recorded in the scholia to Euripides' *Phoenician Women*. After killing Laios and his attendants at the Cleft Way as in the usual story, Oedipus buried them at once in their clothing, removing Laios' sword and belt (*zōstēr*, warrior's belt) to keep them for his own use. After his marriage to Jocasta, he happened to pass through the same area with her after performing some sacrifices on Mt Cithairon, and he told her about the incident, pointing to the relevant spot and showing her the belt. Although she gathered from this that he must have been the man who had killed her former husband, she kept quiet for the moment in spite of her distress, not yet being aware of the worst of the matter, that Oedipus was her son. This was revealed at a later time when an aged horse-breeder came to Thebes to seek a reward for having rescued the young Oedipus many years before. He explained how he had discovered the exposed child and had taken him to Merope, queen of Sicyon, producing his swaddling-clothes as proof, along with the pins that had been driven through his ankles. Jocasta killed herself in response to this further revelation, while Oedipus blinded himself; but he subsequently took a new wife, Euryganeia, who bore him his four children.¹⁰⁰ The narrative is ascribed to Peisandros, here apparently the Hellenistic mythographer of that name rather than the epic poet. Since the truth about the king's past was revealed before Jocasta had time to bear any children to him, and he went on to father his children by his second wife, some have argued that this account, which seems ill-suited besides for presentation in a tragedy, may have originated in early epic.

The death of Oedipus and his final resting place

There were three traditions about the final resting place of Oedipus. In early epic

accounts, in which he remained at Thebes after his origins were revealed, he apparently received a splendid funeral at Thebes, as is indicated in the *Iliad* and was doubtless also the case in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*;¹⁰¹ whereas in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonos* and the standard later tradition, he died in exile and was buried at Colonos, just outside Athens, where a heroic shrine was erected to him in historical times; and there was also a further tradition that claimed that he was buried at the Boeotian town of Eteonos. The familiar story that he met his death at Colonos after long wanderings with his daughter Antigone first appears in the last decade of the fifth century in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonos* (or perhaps slightly earlier in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, if the relevant passage is not part of a later addition). But it seems likely that Sophocles was appealing to an existing tradition (even if it was not a particularly old one) when he located Oedipus' death at Colonos, especially since the story had some basis in cult; thus in 411 BC, when the Athenians defeated some Thebans in a cavalry engagement near Colonos, they believed that they had benefited from the protection of the deified Oedipus.¹⁰²

The plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonos* turns on three oracles. Oedipus has received an oracle telling him that he will at last come to rest when he finds shelter in a sanctuary of the Semnai (Awful Goddesses, i.e. Erinyes, Furies); Creon, who is now ruling at Thebes after having expelled Oedipus, has learned from the Delphic oracle that Oedipus must be buried at Thebes if the city is to be secure, while Athens will prevail over Thebes if he is buried in Attica; and third, Oedipus' son Polyneices has been told that he will prevail in his conflict with his brother Eteocles if he has his father's support. The play begins as Oedipus arrives at Colonos with his daughter Antigone and sits down on a rock in the sanctuary of the Eumenides (Kindly Ones, i.e. Erinyes). Although he is warned by a local man that this is forbidden ground, he recognizes that he has found the place foretold in the oracle and is determined not to move.¹⁰³ His other daughter, Ismene, arrives soon afterwards to tell him that Eteocles has driven Polyneices into exile, and that Creon will be coming to fetch Oedipus back to Thebes for the reasons indicated in the above-mentioned oracle.¹⁰⁴ In response to a summons from the elders of Colonos, Theseus, the king of Athens, then appears on the scene, and responds sympathetically to Oedipus' appeals, offering him sanctuary as requested.¹⁰⁵ Creon appears next with a group of followers, and initially assumes a conciliatory tone in the hope of persuading Oedipus to return with him voluntarily; but he soon resorts to force when Oedipus greets him with scorn, first arresting the daughters of Oedipus with the help of his guards and then approaching Oedipus himself. Theseus is alerted, however, by the loud protests of the elders of Colonos (who form the chorus) and comes to the rescue of his guests.¹⁰⁶ Oedipus' final visitor is his son Polyneices, who comes to ask for his blessing before attacking Eteocles at Thebes; but Oedipus blames his sons for having failed to save him from being exiled, and so curses Polyneices instead, praying that his attack may fail and that he and his brother may kill one another in the fighting (as will duly occur).¹⁰⁷ On hearing three peals of thunder, Oedipus recognizes that the time has come for him to die. He tells Theseus not to disclose the place of his death, and to transmit the secret only within the royal line, saying that his tomb will protect Athens against the Thebans if his instructions are followed. Now striding

forth confidently without need of a guide, Oedipus sets off towards the appointed place accompanied by his daughters and Theseus.¹⁰⁸ A messenger reveals something of the mysterious events that followed, reporting that Oedipus was summoned by a divine voice as he was saying farewell to his daughters, and that he then withdrew to a place apart and vanished from human sight in some wondrous manner that was known to Theseus alone.¹⁰⁹

In a rather different account, perhaps also originating in tragedy, Oedipus came to the hill of Hippios at Colonos after being expelled from Thebes by Creon, and sat down as a suppliant in the temple of Demeter and Athena Poliouchos. Creon tried to remove him by force, but Theseus came to his aid; and when he was dying of old age, he asked Theseus to ensure that no Theban should be shown the site of his grave.¹¹⁰ For what it is worth, Pausanias was told at Colonos that the bones of Theseus had been brought from Thebes; it is just possible that this represents an earlier stage in the development of his Athenian legend.¹¹¹

In connection with the tradition that represented him as having been buried at Eteonos, it was said that his friends had wanted to bury him at Thebes, but took him to an obscure place called Ceos in some other part of Boeotia when this was forbidden to them. Since the local people blamed his presence for troubles that afflicted them thereafter, his friends subsequently removed his remains to Eteonos on the slopes of Mt Cithairon. They reburied him there at dead of night without realizing that they were in the precinct of Demeter; and when the people of Eteonos came to know of this, they sought the advice of the oracle of Apollo, which instructed them not to move this suppliant of the goddess. The relevant tomb could be recognized by an inscription.¹¹²

Notes

- 1 For the dispersion of Agenor's family, see Apollod. 3.1.1. Cilix becomes eponym of Cilicia, Hdt. 7.91, Apollod. 3.1.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 178; Phoinix in Phoenicia, Apollod. l.c., in Africa, Hyg. l.c.
- 2 Hdt. 6.46–7 (here a son of Phoinix); for his connection with the island of Thasos, also Conon 37.1, Apollod. 3.1.1 (poorly expressed if properly preserved), Paus. 5.25.12, Steph. Byz. s.v. Thasos, etc.
- 3 Apollod. 3.4.1.
- 4 Hom. *Il.* 14.321–2, Hes. fr. 140, 141.7–8; Phoinix as son of Agenor and father of Phineus, Hes. fr. 138.
- 5 As children of Agenor, Hdt. 4.147, Apollod. 3.4.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 178 and most Hellenistic and later sources; as children of Phoinix, Hellanic. 4F51, Conon 32.
- 6 Son of Phoinix, Hdt. 6.47; of Agenor, Paus. 5.25.12; of Poseidon or Cilix, Apollod. 3.1.1 (citing Pherecydes for latter parentage = 3F87).
- 7 Hellanic. 4F51, Apollod. 3.4.1, Ov. *Met.* 3.8–25.
- 8 Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 638 (cites supposed oracle), Paus. 9.12.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 178.
- 9 Sacrifices to Athena, Hellanic. 4F51, Apollod. 3.4.1, schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1062; to Earth, schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 638.
- 10 Hellanic. 4F51 (said to be son of Ares), Apollod. 3.4.1 (some say he was the son of Ares); schol. Soph. *Antig.* 126 (son of Erinys Tilphousa); Eur. *Phoen.* 931 (earthborn).
- 11 By unspecified means, Hellanic. 4F51, Apollod. 3.4.1; with sword, Pher. 3F88; with stone, Hellanic. 4F96, cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 657–65, Ov. *Met.* 3.50–94 (with stone and javelin).
- 12 Hellanic. 4F51, Apollod. 3.4.1, Eur. *Phoen.* 666–75, 818–21.
- 13 Pher. 3F22.
- 14 Hellanic. 4F1, Eur. *Madness of Heracles* 252–3, Stesichorus 195 respectively.
- 15 Ibid., Hellanic. 4F1, and likewise in later sources, e.g. Apollod. 3.4.1, Paus. 9.5.1.
- 16 Hellanic. 4F51 (a year), Apollod. 3.4.2 (a great year; it is erroneously stated that he underwent this servitude to atone for the slaughter of the Sown Men, see p. 296).

- 17 Apollod. 3.4.1.
- 18 Ibid. 3.4.2, Pi. *Pyth.* 3.86ff, Theognis 15–18 (Muses and Graces sing), Paus. 9.12.3 (site on acropolis where Muses sang).
- 19 Hellanic. 4F98 (necklace from Aphrodite, robe from Athena), D.S. 4.66.3 (both from Aphrodite), schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 3.167a (necklace from Aphrodite), Apollod. 3.4.2 (both from Cadmos, who had acquired them from Hephaistos), Pher. 3F89 (from Apollod. l.c., Cadmos acquired necklace from Europa), etc.
- 20 Pi. *Pyth.* 3.80–106.
- 21 Paus. 9.12.3.
- 22 Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 7 citing Ephorus and Demagoras, D.S. 5.48.2–49.2.
- 23 Paus. 9.12.3.
- 24 Hdt. 5.59 (introduced by Cadmos and his companions), D.S. 3.67.1 (by Cadmos); Stes. 213 (invented by Palamedes), Aesch. *Prom. Bound.* 460–1 (by Prometheus), Tac. *Ab. Exc.* 11.14 (by Cecrops), Photius s.v. Phoinike (by Actaion), etc.
- 25 Hes. *Theog.* 975–8, Apollod. 3.4.2, D.S. 4.2.1.
- 26 Hes. fr 217A, Paus. 9.2.3 (= Stes. 236).
- 27 Apollod. 3.4.4.
- 28 Eur. *Bacch.* 337–40, cf. D.S. 4.81.4.
- 29 D.S. 4.81.4.
- 30 Call. *Hymn* 5.107–18 (mention of Actaion, 109).
- 31 Ov. *Met.* 4.563ff.
- 32 Paus. 1.44.8.
- 33 Apollod. 3.5.4.
- 34 Ov. *Met.* 4.563ff.
- 35 Passes throne to Polydorus, Paus. 9.5.1; transfers throne to Pentheus initially, Eur. *Bacch.* 43–4, 212–13.
- 36 Steph. Byz. s.v. Bouthoe.
- 37 Apollod. 3.5.4.
- 38 Hyg. *Fab.* 184, 240, 254.
- 39 Eur. *Bacch.* 1330ff; Kadmos' response to prophecy, 1352ff; cf. Hdt. 9.43 (Enchelean attack on Delphi).
- 40 Nic. *Ther.* 607–8, Hyg. *Fab.* 6.
- 41 Ov. *Met.* 4.569–603.
- 42 Pi. *Ol.* 2.78; Hom. *Od.* 4.561–9 (on Menelaos).
- 43 Schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 3.153b.
- 44 Eur. *Bacch.* 1331–2 (transformation), 1338–9 (Ares transfers them to Isles of Blessed), cf. Apollod. 3.5.4.
- 45 Hes. *Theog.* 978, Hdt. 5.59, Eur. *Phoen.* 7–9.
- 46 Apollod. 3.5.5–7, Paus. 9.5.1–5.
- 47 Apollod. 3.5.5.
- 48 Hom. *Od.* 11.260–3.
- 49 Ibid. 11. 263–5.
- 50 Hyg. *Fab.* 8 (ascribed to *Antiope* of Euripides), schol. A.R. 4.1090 (Zeus raped Antiope in form of Satyr).
- 51 Apollod. 3.5.5.
- 52 Paus. 2.6.1–2.
- 53 Eur. *Bacch.* 519ff.
- 54 Thrown into spring, Apollod. 3.5.5, Nic. Damasc. 90F7; eponym of stream, Paus. 9.25.3; body turned into stream, Hyg. *Fab.* 7, blood turned into stream, Vat. Myth. 1.96.
- 55 Hyg. *Fab.* 7.
- 56 Paus. 9.17.3–4.
- 57 E.g. Apollod. 3.5.5, Paus. 9.5.3 (built lower city), D.S. 19.53.5.
- 58 Eur. *Antiope* fr. in Page *SLP* 68.86–9, Apollod. 3.5.5, Palaeph. 41 (citing 'Hesiod' for use of lyre in wall-building, = fr. 182), A.R. 1.735–41, Paus. 9.5.4 (includes reference to *Europeia* = Eumelus *Europeia* fr.3 Davies); Pher. 3F41a (had acquired lyre from Muses).
- 59 Eur. *Antiope*, fr 183–8 Nauck, Pl. *Gorg.* 485e, 506b.
- 60 Hom. *Od.* 11.260–5, Pher. 3F41.
- 61 Hom. *Il.* 24.602–17, D.S. 4.74.3, Apollod. 3.5.6, Ov. *Met.* 6.146–312, Hyg. *Fab.* 9. See also p. 157 and notes.
- 62 Apollod. 3.5.6, Ov. *Met.* 6.271–2, and Hyg. *Fab.* 9 respectively.
- 63 Telesilla 721 *PMG*, Paus. 2.21.10.
- 64 Paus. 5.16.4.
- 65 Apollod. 3.5.6, cf. Paus. 9.5.3. Thebes was also said to have been a mistress of Zeus, Paus. 5.22.6, citing

- Pindar, cf. *Pi. Isthm.* 8.17–20 and schol.
- 66 Hom. *Od.* 19.518–23, Pher. 3F124.
- 67 Paus. 9.5.5.
- 68 Apollod. 3.5.5 (abduction alone mentioned), Peisandros 16F10 (adds that Chrysippos killed himself), Athen. 602f–603a (taken to Thebes).
- 69 Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 66, Peisandros 16F10 respectively.
- 70 Hyg. *Fab.* 85; it is stated in this account that Laios abducted Chrysippos from the Nemean Games. In the revisionist account in Dositheos 54F1 (see Plut. *Moralia* 313c), Pelops finally condones the love affair because Laios says that he is in love with the boy, and Chrysippos is killed by his mother while he is lying at Laios's side.
- 71 Apollod. 3.5.7 (both variants), Hom. *Od.* 11.271 (Epicaste).
- 72 Soph. *Oed. King.* 711ff, 1017ff, Apollod. 3.5.7; cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 12–31 (exposed, and then recovered by servants of Polybos).
- 73 Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 26, 28, Hyg. *Fab.* 66.
- 74 E.g. Peisandros 16F10.8, schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 26, cf. schol. *Od.* 11.271.
- 75 Paus. 2.6.3.
- 76 Merope, Soph. *Oed. King* 775; Periboia, Apollod. 3.5.7, Hyg. *Fab.* 66; Medusa or Antiochis, schol. Soph. *Oed. King* 775, citing Pherecydes (= 3F93) for former.
- 77 E.g. Eur. *Phoen.* 29–31, Apollod. 3.5.7.
- 78 Soph. *Oed. King* 729–813, cf. Apollod. 3.5.7.
- 79 Eur. *Phoen.* 32–45, cf. D.S. 4.64.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 67.
- 80 Paus. 10.5.2.
- 81 Phix, Hes. *Theog.* 326 with schol.; her riddle first mentioned in Soph. *Oed. King* 130–1, 393–4, or in *Pi. fr.* 177d SM if the unnamed riddler is the Sphinx; Eur. *Phoen.* 45–9, 806–11, 1026–31, Asclep. 12F7b, D.S. 4.64.3, Apollod. 3.5.8, Hyg. *Fab.* 67.
- 82 Hera, Peisandros 16F10, Apollod. 3.5.8 (without explanation); Dionysos, schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1031, citing Euripides (= fr. 178 Nauck).
- 83 Haimon killed, *Oedipodeia* fr. 1 Davies, Peisandros 16F10, Apollod. 3.5.8.
- 84 Asclep. 12F7a (quoted in Athen. 456b); for riddle, see also Apollod. 3.5.8, D.S. 4.64.3–4 (very concise version).
- 85 Killed herself, e.g. Palaeph. 4, Apollod. 3.5.8, D.S. 4.64.4; killed by Oedipus, e.g. Eur. *Phoen.* 1507, schol. *ibid.* 26. Mode of death not stated in Soph. *Oed. King*.
- 86 Soph. *Oed. King* and standard later tradition, e.g. Apollod. 3.5.8, Hyg. *Fab.* 67.
- 87 Hom. *Od.* 11.271–80.
- 88 Hom. *Il.* 23.679–80.
- 89 Hom. *Od.* 11.274.
- 90 *Oedipodeia*, fr. 2 Davies (see Paus. 9.5.5).
- 91 Aesch. *Seven* 752–7, 783–4.
- 92 Soph. *Oed. King* 1–281.
- 93 *Ibid.* 282–462.
- 94 *Ibid.* 513–862.
- 95 *Ibid.* 924–1085.
- 96 *Ibid.* 1110–1530.
- 97 Eur. *Phoen.* 1427ff.
- 98 Eur. *Oed.* fr. 541Nauck.
- 99 Hyg. *Fab.* 67.
- 100 Peisandros 16F10 (= schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1760).
- 101 Hom. *Il.* 23.679–80, Hes. fr. 192, 193.
- 102 Soph. *Oed. Col.* 1457ff, Eur. *Phoen.* 1703–9; Paus. 1.30.4 (heroic shrine).
- 103 Soph. *Oed. Col.* 1–309.
- 104 *Ibid.* 310–460.
- 105 *Ibid.* 549–667.
- 106 *Ibid.* 720–1043.
- 107 *Ibid.* 1249–1446.
- 108 *Ibid.* 1457–1555.
- 109 *Ibid.* 1579–1666.
- 110 Schol. *Od.* 11.271.
- 111 Paus. 1.28.7.

16

The Theban Wars

The Seven against Thebes and the myth of Antigone

Polyneices, son of Oedipus, quarrels with his brother Eteocles and departs to Argos

POLYNEICES and ETEOCLES, the two sons of Oedipus, quarrelled over the succession after the exile or death of their father (or when he became too old to rule, or when they were due to take over from Creon who had been ruling as regent until they came of age). The resulting conflict proved to be disastrous for both of them, since they died at another's hands when Polyneices tried to settle the matter by marching against Thebes with foreign allies from Argos. The quarrel also brought disaster to Thebes itself; for although it remained unconquered during this first Theban War, the sons of the defeated Argive leaders launched a second expedition ten years later and captured the city, which never recovered its former strength and glory. The first expedition was known as that of the Seven because its leader appointed seven of the bravest participants to serve as champions, and the second as that of the Epigonoï (i.e. the after-born or successors).

Although disputes could easily arise between rival heirs in the absence of any strict rules of primogeniture, the fundamental cause of the quarrel between Eteocles and Polyneices was usually said to have been a curse that was uttered against them by their father. In the *Thebais*, a poem in the early epic cycle, Oedipus indeed cursed his sons twice over, on the first occasion because they had angered him by serving him at a silver table that had belonged to Cadmos and by passing wine to him in a golden cup of the same origin, even though he had expressly ordered them not to do so (presumably because these heirlooms reminded him of the crime that he had committed against his father). So he prayed that they should not divide their patrimony in friendship, but that war and hatred should always be their lot; and when they angered him once again by sending him a haunch of meat as his portion at a sacrifice rather than the more honourable shoulder-piece (whether by negligence or design), he cursed them yet more grievously by praying that they should die by one another's hand. In tragedy and later sources, other explanations are offered for his cursing of his sons.¹ In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonos*, as we have seen, he thus cursed them to mutual destruction for not having lifted a hand to help

him when he had been expelled from Thebes by Creon; or in other accounts, he cursed them for having shut him up in a dungeon after his unwitting transgressions had been revealed.²

The stories that were put forward to explain how the feud between the brothers initially developed fall into three main patterns. In an account ascribed to Hellanicus, Eteocles allowed Polyneices to make a choice with regard to his inheritance, either to become the new king of Thebes, or else to choose what he wanted from the family treasures and settle elsewhere. He chose to take the two divine heirlooms, the necklace and robe of Harmonia, and departed from Argos, leaving the throne to his brother; and the quarrel evidently arose (although this is not stated in our source) because he later broke the agreement and laid claim to the throne in addition.³ The early lyric poet Stesichorus told a story of a similar nature, in which the mother of the two princes tried to arrange a just settlement through division of the inheritance, proposing that one of them should depart with his father's flocks and gold while the other remained behind to rule at Thebes; so they cast lots, and when that of Polyneices came out first, he departed with the possessions in accordance with the terms of the draw.⁴ Here again we may suppose that Polyneices was to blame for the subsequent war; and since his name means 'Much Strife' while that of his brother means 'True Glory', it is reasonable to assume that he was regarded as the guilty party in the earliest tradition. In the second main version of the story, however, as ascribed to Pherecydes, Eteocles expelled his brother from Thebes by force, and Polyneices could therefore be regarded as having some justification for resorting to force on his own account.⁵ Or, in another version, which first appears in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, the two brothers initially settled matters in a different way, by agreeing that each of them should rule at Thebes in alternate years while the other went into exile, but after ruling for the first year, as the elder brother, Eteocles refused to surrender the throne to Polyneices in accordance with the agreement, giving him ample reason to feel aggrieved. This version, in which Eteocles had come to be presented unequivocally as the guilty party, was the one that was generally favoured in the later tradition.⁶

Whatever the exact circumstances of his exile, Polyneices travelled across the Isthmus of Corinth to the city of Argos, where he married a daughter of the king and gained support from him for an expedition against his native city. Euripides provides the earliest surviving account of the events that led up to his marriage. After reaching Argos at night, he sought shelter in the porch of the palace, but soon quarrelled and came to blows with another man who had arrived there with the same intent, namely TYDEUS, son of Oineus, a violent Aetolian prince who had been exiled from his homeland for murder (see p. 387). They created such a din that the king, ADRASTOS, son of Talaos, was aroused from his sleep and hurried down to investigate. On observing the ferocious brawl, he was reminded of a mysterious oracle that he had received from Apollo ordering him to marry his daughters to a lion and a boar; since the two men resembled wild animals fighting over a den, he welcomed them into his palace in spite of the unfortunate circumstances of their meeting, and offered his daughter ARGEIA to Polyneices and his other daughter, Deipyle, to Tydeus.⁷ He promised, furthermore, to restore them to their native lands,

beginning with Polyneices.⁸ Some later authors explained his interpretation of the oracle in other ways, saying that he recognized the two men as the lion and boar because Polyneices had a lionskin on his shoulders and Tydeus a boar's hide, or because they had images of the foreparts of such animals on their shields (referring to the Sphinx and Calydonian boar respectively).⁹

Pausanias records an account of Polyneices' exile and marriage that follows a quite different pattern. Polyneices departed into exile initially while Oedipus was still on the throne, in the hope that this would enable him to escape his father's curses, and he married Argeia at this time; but Eteocles sent for him after the death of Oedipus and he came back to Thebes (presumably with his wife). The two brothers quarrelled, however, and Polyneices went into exile for a second time, and now asked his father-in-law to help him to seize power at Thebes.¹⁰ This account may quite possibly have been derived from early epic. It is likely in any case that Argeia was married to Polyneices before the death of Oedipus in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, since she is reported to have attended the funeral of Oedipus,¹¹ and it is hard to imagine why she should have done so if she had not married into the family.

Adrastos appoints seven champions for an expedition against Thebes; Amphiaraos and Eriphyle

Adrastos lost no time in gathering together a sizeable army to attack Thebes. Since most of the leading warriors and other troops who marched against Thebes in both Theban Wars came from the Argolid, these were in large part wars between Argos and Thebes, and something must be said in this connection about the complicated pattern of rule that had become established in the Argolid by this period of mythical history. The north-western section of the province, which was ruled from Mycenae and also included Tiryns and Midea, had now fallen under the control of Atreus' branch of the Pelopid family, which was of foreign origin (see pp. 419ff.). The Pelopids and those who were under their rule played no part in either of the Theban Wars. Although the rest of the Argolid was still partly under the control of the old Inachid ruling family, whose history was traced in [Chapter 10](#), two other ruling lines had become installed there when Proitos, king of Argos, had been forced to share the kingdom with the seer Melampous and his brother Bias (see pp. 223ff.). So three royal families were now ruling concurrently in the non-Pelopid lands of the Argolid, namely the Proitids (i.e. the Inachids who were descended from Proitos), the Melampodids and the Biantids. Adrastos, who ruled from his palace in the city of Argos, was of Biantid descent, and although he was the most powerful ruler in that part of the Argolid, he had to seek support from the other two families when attacking the mighty city of Thebes.

Although Adrastos had clearly achieved a dominant position, the other two ruling families had not been reduced to a subordinate status, and their members were not directly subject to his command. Such authority as he possessed had been painfully acquired, because he and his family had previously come out worse in a power struggle with Amphiaraos, the senior member of the Melampodid family, and his Proitid allies. Things had indeed gone so badly for Adrastos that he had been forced

into exile, and had taken refuge at Sicyon, to the west of Corinth. His Sicyonian connections were evidently very ancient because the *Iliad* refers to him as a former king of that city.¹² It is stated in later sources that he chose Sicyon as his place of sanctuary because his mother was a daughter of its ruler, Polybos, and that he succeeded to the throne when Polybos died because he was his closest male descendant; or according to another tradition, he married a daughter of Polybos after his arrival and later inherited the throne because the king had no sons.¹³ Amphiaraios held sway in Argos while Adrastus was in exile, but eventually decided to negotiate a settlement with him for some unexplained reason. Adrastus was then able to return to his native land, and established a dominant position there, whether immediately or by degrees. To seal his reconciliation with Amphiaraios, he offered his sister Eriphyle to him as a wife; and to try to ensure that disharmony should never arise between them again in the future, the two former enemies swore to accept her decision if they should ever fall into any serious disagreement (for she could be expected to be fair-minded as the sister of the one and the wife of the other).¹⁴

In tragedy and the later tradition at least, Adrastus appointed seven champions to lead the forthcoming assault against Thebes, one for each of the seven gates in the walls of the city. It is not known whether these champions, who were known as the Seven against Thebes, already figured in early epic; Pindar may have been following the epic tradition in stating that the Argive dead were burned on seven funeral pyres,¹⁵ but this does not necessarily imply that there were seven champions (especially if it is remembered that two of the usual champions, Amphiaraios and Capaneus, could not have been cremated, for reasons that will become apparent presently).

Most sources agree on the names of six of the seven champions who were appointed.¹⁶ To start with the foreigners **Polyneices** and **Tydeus** were naturally included, and also **Parthenopaios**, who was generally regarded as a son of the Arcadian heroine Atalanta (although he was sometimes described as a brother of Adrastus). All the other champions were drawn from the three Argive royal families mentioned above. **Amphiaraios**, a Melampodid, was also included, as was **Capaneus**, who represented the old Inachid royal family as a descendant of Proitos; and **Adrastos** was almost always said to have numbered himself among the champions. As for the remaining champion, he was variously named as **Mecisteus**, a younger brother of Adrastus, or **Hippomedon**, son of Aristomachos, a nephew of Adrastus, or **Eteoclos**, son of Iphis, a cousin of Capaneus, all three of whom were so lacking in individual character as to be virtually interchangeable. If any of the usual champions were omitted for some reason, more than one of these lesser figures could find a place in the list. Thus in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, in which Adrastus does not include himself among the champions (see p. 357), both Eteoclos and Hippomedon are numbered among the Seven; or additional Argives could be included from among the lesser men if Polyneices and Tydeus were excluded because they were foreigners.

Since many members of the three Argive royal families took part in the two Theban Wars, and Adrastus was the only champion to return from the first war, these wars would have serious implications for the dynastic history of the Argolid,

and so would have as grave an effect on Argos as on Thebes itself. This aspect of the Theban Wars will be discussed separately at the end of the chapter.

AMPHIARAOS, who was perhaps the most formidable of the champions who were appointed by Adrastos, was a gifted seer like his forebear Melampous and knew in advance that the enterprise was doomed to disaster. Foreseeing that none of the leaders would return alive apart from Adrastos, he initially refused to take part and tried to discourage the others. Anxious to find a solution to this difficulty, Polyneices sought the advice of a prominent Argive, Iphis, son of Alektor (see p. 368), who told him that the seer could be forced to take part if his wife ERIPHYLE desired it; for Amphiaraios had sworn in circumstance already described to accept her decision if he should ever fall into serious disagreement with Adrastos. So Polyneices approached her in secret and promised her his splendid ancestral treasure, the divine necklace of Harmonia, if she would order her husband to march off against Thebes as Adrastos wished. In one version at least, Amphiaraios had foreseen trouble from this quarter and had specifically forbidden her to accept any gift from Polyneices, but the temptation proved irresistible nevertheless. Eriphyle repaid the bribe by sending her husband to his death, so becoming a byword for treachery. Setting off under compulsion, and knowing that Eriphyle had allowed herself to be corrupted, Amphiaraios ordered his son Alcmaion (and his other son Amphilochos too in one version) to put her to death when he grew up, and to mount a second expedition against Thebes at some future time.¹⁷ The *Iliad* reports that Tydeus and Polyneices visited Mycenae before the war in the hope of enlisting further allies; but although the Mycenaeans initially agreed to provide a force of troops, Zeus deterred them by sending bad omens.¹⁸

The death of Opheltes and embassy of Tydeus

As Adrastos and his army were marching towards the Isthmus, they passed through Nemea in the northern Argolid, where they became involved in a strange incident that led to the founding of the Nemean Games. The city was ruled at that time by Lycourgos, son of Pheres, who had appointed HYPSSIPYLE, the former queen of Lemnos, to act as nursemaid to his infant son OPHELTES. As we will see, the Lemnian women had conspired together to kill all their menfolk, but Hypsipyle had broken the agreement by sparing her aged father Thoas (see p. 400); and when the other women had discovered this, they had sold her into slavery. Or, in another version, she had escaped abroad after her action had been discovered, but had then been captured by pirates who had sold her to Lycourgos.¹⁹ Adrastos and his companions happened to run across her in Nemea and asked her to show them the way to a spring, for they were thirsty after their long journey (or else needed water for a sacrifice). So she placed the infant Opheltes on a bed of wild parsley and led them to the water. Although an oracle had warned that Opheltes should never be placed on the ground until he could walk, she thought that he would be safe because he would not come into direct contact with the ground. On returning from the spring, however, she found that the child had been killed by a snake. Adrastos and his followers killed the snake, and interceded with Lycourgos on Hypsipyle's behalf;

and they then gave little Opheltas a magnificent funeral, renaming him Archemoros (Beginning of Doom) because Amphiaraios declared that his death was an evil sign that indicated that many members of the army would lose their lives in the forthcoming conflict. They also held funeral games in honour of the dead child, so founding the Nemean Games, at which the judges wore dark clothing as a sign of mourning and the victors were awarded a crown of wild parsley. As for Hypsipyle, she was finally rescued from her captivity by Euneos and Thoas, the two sons whom she had borne to Jason.²⁰

Before launching his assault against Thebes, Adrastus sent Tydeus ahead to the city to see whether the dispute could be settled in Polyneices' favour by diplomatic means. In the earliest account in the *Iliad*, Tydeus set off after the army had passed some distance on its way and had reached the thickly reeded Asopos (presumably the river of that name in southern Boeotia), and found the Cadmeians (i.e. Thebans) feasting in the palace of Eteocles when he arrived in the city. He challenged them all to contests, doubtless in wrestling or the like, and defeated all of them very easily with a little help from Athena. Angered by the humiliation, the Thebans laid an ambush for him, posting fifty young men to attack him during his return journey, but he killed all of them apart from one of their leaders, Maion, son of Haimon, a grandson of Creon, whom he spared in response to portents from the gods. Although Homer does not say that Tydeus failed in his main purpose, we can assume that the mission failed, as in the case of the similar embassy before the Trojan War (see p. 467).²¹ In Apollodorus' account, he is said to have challenged all the Thebans to single combat by way of a test after Eteocles rejected his overtures.²² Diodorus offers a somewhat different account of the story in which Adrastus sent him from Argos before the start of the expedition, and he was ambushed on the way to Thebes.²³

The fighting at Thebes and fate of the Seven

Although we have almost no direct information on how the fighting at Thebes was described in the early epic tradition, there seems to have been general agreement from an early period on the fate of the main Argive champions.²⁴ After an initial confrontation in which the Thebans were driven back into their city, the attackers tried to storm the walls but were driven back in their turn. The major casualty during the assault was the impiously arrogant **Capaneus**, who boasted that he would enter and set fire to the city whether Zeus wished it or not, provoking that god to strike him with a thunderbolt while he was scaling the walls. According to Apollodorus,²⁵ this incident marked a turning-point because it caused the other Argives to flee back from the city walls. Either during the attack on the walls or during a pause in the fighting after the attackers fell back, **Polyneices** and Eteocles confronted one another in single combat and killed one another.²⁶ As the battle proceeded in front of the city, **Tydeus** was fatally wounded by Melanippos, son of Astacos, a descendant of one of the Spartoi (Sown Men, who were supposed to have founded the military caste at Thebes, see p. 333). Tydeus was a favourite of Athena, who planned to confer immortality on him, but Amphiaraios was determined to frustrate her attempt because he hated Tydeus for his violent ways and for having

helped to instigate the disastrous war. So he cut off the head of Melanippos, who had been killed by Amphiaraios (or fatally wounded by Tydeus himself), and tossed it to Tydeus, in the expectation of a savagely vengeful reaction; and when he cracked it open to gulp down the brains of the man who had caused his demise, Athena was so revolted that she withheld the magical potion that she had intended to apply to him.²⁷ **Parthenopaios** was killed by Periclymenos, son of Poseidon and Chloris, daughter of Teiresias,²⁸ who went on to pursue **Amphiaraios** from the battlefield, and would have struck him in the back with his spear if Zeus had not intervened by opening up a chasm in the ground with a thunderbolt, so enabling the seer to disappear beneath the earth along with his chariot and charioteer. This latter episode is already described by Pindar; and it is reported elsewhere that the charioteer of Amphiaraios was a certain Baton who was a kinsman of his.²⁹ Amphiaraios vanished from human sight, either at Cnopia, a place near Thebes on the road to Potniai, or further away at Harma (Chariot) between Thebes and the east coast, or at Oropos on the frontier between Boeotia and Attica. He delivered oracles during his posthumous existence, principally at Oropos but also at Cnopia (hence the traditions that located his disappearance at these places).³⁰ Of all the Argive champions, **Adrastos** alone escaped, thanks to the speed of his wondrous horse Areion, which was a child of Poseidon by Demeter Erinys (see p. 127).³¹ No picturesque stories are associated with the deaths of the minor champions; according to Apollodorus, **Eteoclos** and **Hippomedon** were killed by Leades and Ismaros respectively, two brothers of the Melanippos who is mentioned above as the killer of Tydeus.³²

Aeschylus presents an idiosyncratic account of the conflict in his *Seven against Thebes*. In this tragedy, each of the seven champions from the Argive force is said to have confronted a Theban defender at each of the seven gates, in accordance with the following arrangement:

<i>Defender</i>	
Melanippos	Melanippos, son of Astacos
Polynices	Polynices
Megareus	Megareus, son of Creon
Hippomedon	Hippomedon, son of Oinops
Parthenopaios	Parthenopaios, son of Oinops
Amphiaraios	Amphiaraios
Tydeus	Tydeus

With the exception of Eteocles, Melanippos, and Megareus, the defenders are otherwise unknown, and some of them may have been invented by Aeschylus himself. Towards the end of the play, a messenger reports that all has gone well for the Thebans at six of the gates, but that the king of Thebes and his brother have killed one another at the seventh gate;³³ this would mean, of course, that the outcome was settled by a series of single combats at the individual gates before there could be occasion for any subsequent fighting in front of the city. To maintain a consistent pattern, Aeschylus departs from the usual tradition by excluding Adrastos, as a known survivor, from his list of champions. It will be noted, furthermore, that except in the case of the opponents of Polyneices and Tydeus, the defenders who kill

the champions are not the men who are usually said to have killed them. For a tale from Euripides in which Menoiceus, son of Creon, is said to have sacrificed himself to ensure victory for Thebes, see p. 366.

Creon tries to forbid the burial of the Argive dead

After the death of the two sons of Oedipus, CREON took power at Thebes once again, either as king in his own right or as regent for Laodamas, the infant son of Eteocles. He ordered that the Theban dead should be buried with all honour, especially Eteocles, but that the bodies of the attackers should be left to rot, a decree that offended not only against common feelings of humanity, but also against the gods above and below, since the latter were defrauded of their due and the former polluted by the corpses that were left in their realm.³⁴ There is no indication that this story of the prohibition was known before the fifth century BC (although it should be remembered that we have very little early evidence on anything connected with the war). When the fateful decree first appears in Attic tragedy, it has two notable consequences: Creon's niece Antigone tries to bury her brother Polyneices, setting in course a train of events that brings disaster to the Theban royal family, and Adrastus enlists the aid of Theseus and the Athenians to force the Thebans to allow the burial of the Argive dead. Polyneices was finally buried at Thebes, alongside his brother in some accounts,³⁵ while the bodies of the other champions (apart from Amphiaras of course) were taken off to Attica to be buried at Eleusis.³⁶ Pindar is doubtless drawing on the early epic tradition when he speaks of seven funeral pyres burning near Thebes itself.³⁷

The decree forbidding the burial of the Argive dead is first attested for the *Eleusinians* of Aeschylus, a lost tragedy dating to the end of the first quarter of the fifth century. In this play, Theseus helped Adrastus to recover the bodies of his comrades by negotiating a settlement, evidently with the threat of force, rather than by defeating the Thebans in battle as in the usual account.³⁸ Pausanias reports that the Thebans themselves preferred this version of the story, as is wholly understandable;³⁹ some said that this was the first truce ever to be arranged for the burial of the dead.⁴⁰ The title of Aeschylus' play suggests that the chorus would have been made up of citizens of Eleusis, the town where the Argive dead would have been laid to rest. When the theme is taken up again in Euripides' *Suppliants*, a play written half a century later, the chorus is made up of the mothers of the Argive dead, who accompany Adrastus to Athens and appeal as suppliants to Aithra, the mother of Theseus, at the shrine of Demeter at Eleusis. On arriving to investigate, Theseus responds sympathetically to the entreaties of Adrastus and the women of the chorus, who are now supported by Aithra, and agrees to take up their cause. Ignoring a Theban herald who asks him to expel Adrastus and warns him not to set foot on Theban soil, Theseus collects an army together to attack Thebes, defeats Creon and the Thebans, and takes the dead back to give them an honourable burial. Since Capaneus was killed by a thunderbolt from Zeus, his corpse is marked off from the others as sacred and burned on a separate funeral-pyre;⁴¹ as it is burning, his wife Euadne throws herself on to it to join him in death,⁴² an act reminiscent of Hindu

sati, but without parallel in Greek mythology. It is a happy thought of various latish authors to make the suppliants take refuge at the altar of Mercy (Eleos) in Athens rather than at Eleusis.⁴³

The mythology of Antigone

The standard version of the story of ANTIGONE was established by Sophocles in his play of that name. Although the king has forbidden the burial of Polyneices on pain of death, his sister Antigone, as his nearest surviving relative, is determined to bury him nonetheless, and the play begins as she vainly attempts to persuade ISMENE, her more cautious sister, to join her in the enterprise.⁴⁴ So Antigone is obliged to take action on her own, and grants her brother a formal burial at least by scattering some dust over his corpse. The dust is soon noticed by Creon's guards, however, who brush it away and lie in wait nearby; and when Antigone returns to replace it and to pour funeral-libations, they capture her and haul her in front of Creon.⁴⁵ She defends her actions with stubborn courage, arguing that the king has abused his authority and that the unwritten and unfailing laws of the gods take precedence over his arbitrary decree; but her defiance merely serves to antagonize him, and he resolves that she should be walled up alive in a tomb.⁴⁶ When Ismene is then brought in front of him, she is so moved by the plight of her sister that she asks to share in her guilt and punishment, but Antigone protests that she has no right to make any such claim since she had failed to take action when the moment had demanded.⁴⁷ Creon's son HAIMON, who is betrothed to Antigone, arrives after the two girls are led away, and tries to persuade his father to show mercy to his fiancée, warning him that the Thebans sympathize with her and are saying that she deserves to be honoured rather than killed. But Creon refuses to listen and orders that the sentence should be put into effect.⁴⁸ He is finally obliged to relent, however, when the seer Teiresias reveals that the gods have been offended by his prohibition of the burial, and are therefore rejecting all Theban sacrifices and prayers;⁴⁹ but his change of heart comes too late because Antigone has already hanged herself in her sepulchre. As the audience subsequently learns from a messenger, Creon entered the vault to find that she was hanging from a linen noose, while Haimon, who had entered just before, was embracing her corpse and bewailing her fate. When Creon called out to him, Haimon drew his sword and tried to strike his father with it, but missed him and then committed suicide by driving it into his own body. On hearing this news from the messenger, Eurydice, the wife of Creon, retired into the palace to kill herself in her turn; and Creon is left to contemplate his guilt as the play draws to a close.⁵⁰

Little is known about the earlier development of the mythology of Antigone, and there is no mention even of her name in the surviving literature until the fifth century BC. She first appears in an extract from Pherecydes, which refers to her along with her usual brothers and sisters, as children who were borne to Oedipus by his second wife Euryganeia (rather than by Jocasta as in the tragic and later tradition).⁵¹ In the present text of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, Antigone and Ismene are introduced into the final section of the play, in which they lament the

death of their brothers until they are interrupted by a herald, who arrives to announce that the ruling body of the city has forbidden the burial of Polyneices; Antigone then declares openly that she will see to his burial, to the approval of the chorus of Theban women, who offer to form the funeral cortege for the brothers.⁵² If this scene formed part of the original play, it would have been written some twenty-five years before Sophocles treated the same theme in *Antigone*. There is good reason to suppose, however, that the end of Aeschylus' play was altered at a later date, perhaps in the final decade of the fifth century, well after *Antigone* was first performed. The laments uttered by the two sisters prior to the arrival of the herald may have been shared out between the two half-choruses in the original version. The account of the interdiction and of the way in which Antigone defies it differs in important respects from that offered by Sophocles. The edict forbidding the burial has been issued by the deputies of the people (*probouloi*) rather than by Creon;⁵³ no penalty is announced for disobedience; and it is indicated that Antigone will give her brother a proper burial with the help of the other Theban women rather than a token burial on her own in secret.⁵⁴ It is quite possible that this comes closer to the original story than does the starker version in Sophocles' play, who heightens the dramatic tension by presenting Antigone as a solitary heroine who engages in a battle of wills with the king.

There are versions of her story in which she is saved from death by her fiancé Haimon when she is first arraigned in front of Creon. Hyginus records an account of this kind in which Antigone removed Polyneices' body under cover of darkness with the help of his wife Argeia and placed it on the funeral-pyre of Eteocles. She was captured by the guards, although Argeia managed to escape, and was brought in front of Creon, who handed her over to Haimon to be put to death; but Haimon, who was betrothed to her, as in Sophocles' version, loved her too much to make more than a pretence of obeying, and secretly hid her away with some shepherds. While she was in hiding, she bore Haimon a son, here left unnamed, who visited Thebes when he grew up to take part in some games. Since descendants of the Spartoi could be identified by a distinctive birthmark (which was shaped like a lance), Creon realized who he must be and ordered his execution, remaining obdurate even when Heracles (who spent his earlier years in Thebes as a subject of his) begged him to show mercy. Haimon was so distressed by this turn of events that he took his own life after first killing his hidden wife Antigone.⁵⁵ Although some have argued that this account was largely based on the lost *Antigone* of Euripides (in which Antigone is known to have married Haimon after her capture and to have borne him a son called Maion), it seems more likely that it is a composite version drawn from a variety of sources. What little is left of Euripides' plot suggests that a happy ending was somehow achieved, perhaps with Haimon being allowed to marry Antigone through the intervention of Dionysos, who is addressed by somebody in terms of ardent adoration in a surviving fragment.⁵⁶

As we have seen above, Haimon and his son Maion were already known in early epic as a victim of the Sphinx and an opponent of Tydeus respectively (see pp. 344 and 356); but these traditions are inconsistent with those that present Haimon as the fiancé or secret lover of Antigone, since he would have been killed before her birth

or at least have belonged to an earlier generation. Sophocles is the first author to present him as being betrothed to Antigone,⁵⁷ and it is quite possible that he invented the idea, so preparing the way for Euripides to make a further alteration in the tradition by presenting Maion as his son by Antigone; we have no record of the name of his original mother in the early epic tradition, in which he would certainly not have been the product of any secret union.

Pausanias mentions that there was a place near Thebes called 'Antigone's Pull' (*Syrma Antigonēs*); according to the local tradition, it was called by that name because Antigone had tried to carry Polyneices' body from there, but had found it too heavy to lift and had therefore pulled it along the ground to place it on Eteocles' pyre.⁵⁸ According to another local tradition, Maion buried Tydeus beside the road from Thebes to Chalcis after the defeat of the Seven⁵⁹ (evidently giving him a proper burial because Tydeus had spared his life previously, as was well known from the *Iliad*, see p. 356).

Ion of Chios, a poet of the fifth century BC, is reported to have written in a dithyramb that Antigone and Ismene were burned to death in the temple of Hera by Laodamas, son of Eteocles.⁶⁰ Although we have no record of how they had offended him, they had presumably fled to the temple for sanctuary, obliging him to resort to this act of sacrilege if he was to cause their death. It is at least possible that they had angered him by burying Polyneices against his orders.

We may conclude with a mysterious early account of the death of Ismene. The elegiac poet Mimnermus (second half of the seventh century BC) is reported to have stated that she was killed by Tydeus at the instigation of Athena while she was having intercourse with a certain Theoclymenos. There is otherwise no record of a hero of this name at Thebes. When the incident is portrayed, however, on a Corinthian black-figure amphora of c. 560 BC (Louvre E640), the naked figure that is shown fleeing as Tydeus threatens Ismene with a sword is named as Periclymenos instead; and since Periclymenos was mentioned in the *Thebais* as the killer of Parthenopaios (one of the Seven, see p. 357), it is reasonable to assume that the Theoclymenos in the report above can be identified with this Theban hero.⁶¹ Tydeus might have been in a position to kill Ismene while he was visiting Thebes as an ambassador, but we have no way of telling why Athena should have wanted him to do so, or why she should have chosen him in particular for this task. Pherecydes also states that Ismene was killed by Tydeus, at a spring that bore her name.⁶²

The second Theban War and its consequences

The Epigonoï capture Thebes under the leadership of Alcmaion

Ten years after the expedition of the Seven, the sons of the fallen champions launched a second expedition against Thebes to avenge the fate of their fathers. The force was commanded by ALCMAION, son of Amphiaraios, who had been ordered by his father to attack Thebes when he came of age; and the attackers were destined to succeed on this occasion just as their fathers had been destined to fail.⁶³ The leading

warriors were known as the **EPIGONOI** (i.e. the Afterborn or Younger Generation; the Greek term lacks the pejorative associations of its English derivative 'epigone').

As in the case of the Seven, the various catalogues of the Epigonoi are not entirely consistent.⁶⁴ Since most authors agreed on the identities of six of the Seven, we will begin with the sons of these. To start with the children of the three foreigners, Polyneices is replaced by his son **Thersandros**, who will become the new king of Thebes after the city is captured; Tydeus is replaced by his son **Diomedes**, who is of Argive descent through his mother and will rule as the successor of his father-in-law Adrastos; and Parthenopaios is replaced by his son **Promachos** (or else a son named Stratolaos, or Therimenes, or Biantes). Although Adrastos, the Biantid king of Argos, accompanies the expedition, he is now too old to fight as one of the leading warriors, and is replaced in that respect by his son **Aigialeus**, who will be the only leader to die on this successful expedition, just as his father had been the only champion to survive defeat in the first war. As for the main representatives of the two other Argive royal families, the Melampodid **Alcmaion** takes the place of his father Amphiaraios, and Proitid **Sthenelos** takes the place of his father Capaneus.

Since the last of the seven champions in the first war was named variously as Mecisteus, Hippomedon, or Eteoclos, sons of these – Euryalos, Maion, and Polydoros respectively – may sometimes be found among the Epigonoi. It should be remarked, however, that the number of the Epigonoi was not strictly limited to seven as in the case of the Seven against Thebes, and most catalogues list eight or more, especially since Alcmaion was often said to have been accompanied by his brother Amphilochos, and more than one son of Polyneices was often said to have taken part. The exact nature of the list makes little difference, however, because hardly any of the Epigonoi are credited with distinctive roles in the surviving accounts.

It was perhaps inevitable that some authors should have recycled the story of Eriphyle's treachery (see p. 355) by suggesting that Thersandros, son of Polyneices, bribed her to persuade her sons to join the Epigonoi by offering her the robe of Harmonia, just as Polyneices had bribed Eriphyle to force her husband to join the Seven by offering her the necklace of Harmonia. This was not a happy inspiration, however, since her sons had no reason to fear disaster as their father had, and she was not in a position to compel them in any case as she had been with their father. Apollodorus offers some sort of explanation, saying that her persuasions were needed because Alcmaion was reluctant to march off before he had punished her for her betrayal of Amphiaraios. It will be remembered that Amphiaraios had ordered Alcmaion to avenge him. In Diodorus' account, Alcmaion is said to have consulted the Delphic oracle about the campaign and the punishment of his mother, and was told that he should join the campaign and also take action against his mother, all the more so because she had now accepted the second bribe to endanger his own life.⁶⁵

Very little is recorded of the campaign of the Epigonoi, which was described in a poem in the epic cycle. Pindar reports that Amphiaraios delivered a prophecy from his grave when they arrived at Thebes, foretelling that Alcmaion would enter the city first of all carrying a shield showing an image of a dragon, and that the omens were more favourable for Adrastos than they had been on the previous expedition, except with regard to his own family (for his son was destined to be the only victim among

the Argive leaders).⁶⁶ In Apollodorus' account, which is probably based on the early epic tradition, the Epigonoι ravaged the villages around Thebes to provoke the Thebans to venture out of their city, and then defeated them in battle, presumably at some site near the city. Although LAODAMAS, son of Eteocles, the king and commander of the Thebans, killed Aigialeus, the son of Adrastus, he was soon killed in his turn by Alcarnion, and the Thebans were so dismayed by his death that they lost courage and took refuge behind their city walls. Realizing that the city was doomed, the seer Teiresias advised them to send a herald to the enemy to distract them with talk of a settlement while the citizens made a secret departure by night. As soon as the Argives realized that the Thebans had fled, they entered the city, plundered it, and pulled down the walls. In accordance with a previous vow, they sent the finest of the spoils to Delphi to be dedicated to Apollo (see further on p. 366).⁶⁷ According to Herodotus, the Theban exiles settled far away in Hestiaiotis, the north-western region of Thessaly, displacing the Dorians who had previously lived there; the historian may well have drawn this information from the early epic account in the *Epigonoι* (for he was certainly acquainted with the poem, as we know from a passing allusion in another context).⁶⁸

Pausanias offers a different account of the conflict, saying that the Thebans established a base about eight miles north-east of their city at Glisas, and were defeated in a battle nearby. Laodamas killed Aigialeus as above, but survived in this version to lead the defeated troops back into Thebes. The supposed tomb of the Argive dead could be seen at Glisas; Promachos, son of Parthenopaios, is mentioned as having been included among the fallen. Laodamas fled from Thebes under cover of nightfall with the citizens who chose to accompany him, and settled in Illyria (in the north-west adjoining the Adriatic).⁶⁹ To reconcile this account with the one above in which the Theban emigrants were said to have settled in Thessaly, it was suggested that some of the Thebans were unwilling to follow Laodamas all the way to Illyria, and therefore turned aside to settle in Thessaly; this tale also provided an explanation for the name of one of the gates of Thebes, for it was said that this last group were subsequently invited home, and that the gate through which they entered was named the Homoloidian Gate after Homole, the place of their exile in Thessaly.⁷⁰ This second account of the war and its aftermath was probably of later origin than the preceding version. Although it is not impossible that the battle was set at Glisas in early epic, that seems unlikely in view of town's position, for it lay well out of the way of any army approaching Thebes from the south; Hellanicus in the fifth century BC is the first author to name it as the battle-site.⁷¹

The Epigonoι entered Thebes unopposed after it had been deserted by most of its citizens, and installed Thersandros, the son of Polyneices, as its ruler.⁷² The conquerors were said to have pulled down the walls, and the city ceased to be of any great importance in mythical history thenceforth. The new king and his descendants will be considered below (see pp. 363–4). As the Argive army was marching home to Argos, Adrastus died on the way at Megara of old age and sorrow at the death of his son. His tomb could be seen in the city (although he also had heroic shrines in other places), and his son Aigialeus was buried nearby, at Pagai in the Megarid.⁷³

The later history of Alcmaion

ALCMAION was now finally in a position to exact vengeance against his mother Eriphyle for having caused the death of his father Amphiaraios a decade before (see p. 354), having additional reason to do so in the version of the story in which she also accepted a bribe to persuade her sons to go to war (see p. 361). After first having won the approval of Apollo at Delphi, he put her to death, either on his own or in conjunction with his brother Amphilochos; but although he had taken the precaution of consulting the Delphic oracle, he was persecuted nevertheless by his mother's Erinyes (Furies), just as Orestes was said to have been after killing his mother Clytemnestra (see p. 516).⁷⁴

Overcome by madness as a consequence he fled to his grandfather Oicles in Arcadia, and then onwards to Psophis in the north-west of that province, where he was purified by the local ruler, Phegeus. The king offered him his daughter Arsinoe (or Alphisiboia) as a wife, and he settled down with her in her homeland, giving her the necklace and robe of Harmonia as wedding-gifts. He was still polluted, however, in spite of the purification that he had received, and the land became barren as a result of his presence. An oracle advised him to search for a land on which the sun had not yet shone at the time when he had killed his mother;⁷⁵ and his search took him across the Isthmus to the Greek mainland. After spending some time with Oineus at Calydon, he travelled further north into Epirus and visited the springs of the great River Acheloos, where he received purification from the god of the river.

On arriving at the mouth of the Acheloos at the entrance to the Corinthian Gulf, he finally discovered the land that the oracle had indicated, for new land had been laid down there by silt from the river since the time of his mother's death. So he made that his new home, marrying Callirhoe, a daughter of the river-god. When she subsequently asked to be given the necklace and robe of Harmonia, threatening to leave him if she failed to acquire them, he returned to Psophis and tricked Phegeus into handing them over, by claiming that the Delphic oracle had advised him that he should dedicate them at Delphi if he was to be cured of his madness. After his departure, however, a servant of his told Phegeus that he was really taking the treasures to his new wife. So the king ordered his two sons, Pronoos and Agenor, to lay an ambush for him and put him to death. When their sister Arsinoe reproached them afterwards for having murdered her former husband, they took her to Tegea in south-eastern Arcadia and handed her over to the ruler, Agapenor, as a slave-woman, telling him that she herself had committed the murder.

On learning of Alcmaion's fate, his new wife Callirhoe appealed to Zeus (who had become her lover) to cause her two young sons, ACARNAN and AMPHOTEROS, to grow to maturity immediately to enable them to avenge their father's murder. Her request was duly granted, and the two young men (as they had now become) set off at once for Arcadia. They happened to call in at the palace of Agapenor while the sons of Phegeus were still there after having brought their sister, and they took advantage of this opportunity to kill them; and they then travelled on to Psophis to kill Phegeus, the instigator of the murder, along with his wife. Although they were pursued afterwards as far as Tegea, they were saved by the intervention of the

Tegeans and some Argives, and hurried back to their mother to report their success. At the order of Acheloos, they dedicated the robe and necklace of Harmonia to Apollo at Delphi. Acarnan was the eponym of Acarnania, the westernmost province of Central Greece; he and his brother were said to have colonized the area with settlers assembled in Epirus. Their new home lay close to their birthplace, for the Acheloos ran to the sea along the border between Acarnania and Aetolia, the adjoining province to the east.⁷⁶

Thersandros, king of Thebes, and his descendants

THERSANDROS, son of Polyneices, became the new king of Thebes ten years after his father had been killed while trying to seize the throne from Eteocles. Since he was of Cadmeian descent like the ousted king, Laodamas, son of Eteocles, the city continued to be ruled by the old royal family in spite of its fall, even if it was not the centre of power that it had once been. He married Demonassa, a daughter of the seer Teiresias, who bore him a son and heir who was named TEISAMENOS (Avenger) in commemoration of his father's achievement in avenging the defeat and death of Polyneices.⁷⁷ After ruling uneventfully for some years, Thersandros set out for Troy as the leader of the Boeotian contingent; but he never arrived there because he was killed on the way by Telephos, king of Mysia, when the Greeks attacked his land in the belief that it was Troy (see p. 462). Since Teisamenos was not yet of fighting age, the Thebans chose Peneleos, son of Hippalcimos (a descendant of Boiotos, son of Poseidon, the eponym of Boeotia) as their new leader.⁷⁸

Although Thersandros is never mentioned in the Homeric epics, he must have been an ancient figure because the story of his death was recounted in the *Cypria*, an early epic in the Trojan cycle.⁷⁹ The Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad* names Peneleos and Leitos, son of Electryon, another descendant of Boiotos, as the leaders of the Boeotians (along with three obscure heroes, Arcesilaos, Prothoenor, and Clonios, who are all killed in the fighting and were probably invented by Homer himself). The most striking feature of Homer's account of the Boeotian forces is the fact that Thebes is not singled out from the other Boeotian towns as a place of any special significance; there is not even any mention, indeed, of Thebes as such, but only of Hypothebai (i.e. Lower Thebes), apparently a settlement that had grown up around the ruined and abandoned city.⁸⁰ Setting aside the obviously fabulous features in the story of the Theban Wars, the legend may well have had some basis in historical fact, in so far as it reflected a serious decline in the city's fortunes at the end of the Mycenaean period.

When Peneleos was killed in his turn in the closing stages of the Trojan War by Eurypylos, the last major ally of the Trojans (see p. 481), Teisamenos was old enough to take over as leader. He returned home safely to Thebes to rule as his father's successor; but his son Autesion was troubled by ancient family curses and finally went abroad on the advice of the Delphic oracle, accompanying the Heraclids and Dorians to the Peloponnese. On his departure, the Thebans offered the throne to Peneleos' grandson Damasichthon, and they were then ruled by him and his heirs until the monarchy was abolished in the time of his grandson.⁸¹ The exiled Autesion

had two notable children, Argeia and Theras, who were of greater importance than these shadowy last kings of Thebes. Argeia married Aristodemos, one of the Heraclids, at the time of their successful invasion of the Peloponnese two generations or so after the Trojan War, and she bore him twin sons who became the first Heraclid kings of Sparta; but since they were very young at the time of their father's death, their uncle Theras initially ruled on their behalf as regent until they were old enough to assume power in their own right (see further on pp. 281–2).

Teiresias, the great seer of Thebes, and his daughter Manto

Before departing from Thebes, we must consider the career of the great Theban seer TEIRESIAS, whose life was thought to have spanned most of the earlier history of the city from the reign of Pentheus until the arrival of the Epigonoι, because he was supposed to have lived for an extraordinary length of time, seven generations according to the *Melampodeia* (a Hesiodic poem devoted to mythical seers).⁸² He is already recognized as a most exceptional figure in the *Odyssey*, for it reports that Persephone granted him the special privilege of retaining the full use of his mind in Hades, while other dead mortals flit around as empty shades.⁸³ His father was a certain Eueres, who was a descendant of Oudaios, one of the men who had sprung from the dragon's teeth, while his mother was a nymph called Chariclo,⁸⁴ and he was famous on two counts: for the services that he performed as a seer during his very long life, and for having been turned into a woman and then back into a man.⁸⁵

These transformations came about as a result of encounters with snakes. In an early account ascribed to Hesiod, presumably derived from the *Melampodeia*, he once saw a pair of snakes mating on Mt Cyllene in Arcadia, and was transformed into a woman when he struck and wounded them, but he was later turned into a man again when he saw the snakes mating on a second occasion.⁸⁶ According to Ovid, he remained a woman for seven years, and deliberately struck the snakes when he saw them mating again, reasoning that he would then undergo a corresponding transformation;⁸⁷ and it was generally agreed that he struck them on the second occasion too, as he was probably already said to have done in the full Hesiodic narrative. Some authors explained the nature of the transformations by saying that he killed the female when he first saw two snakes mating, and then the male when he saw some snakes mating on a second occasion. He was sometimes said to have trampled on them rather than having struck them with his staff.⁸⁸ There was disagreement as to whether these episodes occurred on Mt Cithairon in his Boeotian homeland or on Mt Cyllene in Arcadia.⁸⁹

In the Hesiodic narrative, he was said to have acquired his prophetic powers as a result of his experiences as a woman. For when Zeus and Hera were once arguing as to whether men or women gain more pleasure from sexual intercourse, they decided to refer the matter to the arbitration of Teiresias, who was alone in a position to judge from personal experience; and he responded that if the pleasure may be judged on a scale of ten, a man enjoys one part only while a woman enjoys all ten. Or, in a secondary version, he is reported to have said that a man enjoys one part and a woman nine, as if there were ten units of pleasure to be shared out between them.⁹⁰

Hera was angered by his reply, presumably because she thought it shaming for women, and reacted by turning him blind; but Zeus, who was evidently pleased to have found his arguments confirmed, compensated him by granting him prophetic powers and an extended life-span.⁹¹

Apollodorus remarks that two conflicting explanations were offered for the blindness of Teiresias, for some also said that he was blinded by the gods for betraying their secrets to mortals (which would imply that he already possessed his prophetic powers at the time), whereas Pherecydes said that he was blinded by Athena because he saw her naked, in which case the goddess covered his eyes with her hands to deprive him of his sight, much to the distress of his mother Chariclo (who was presumably bathing in the company of the goddess as in the account below). Although Chariclo begged her to restore his sight, the goddess was unable to reverse her action, but granted him some compensation instead by enabling him to understand the language of birds (i.e. granting him divinatory powers, cf. p. 223), and by giving him a cornel-wood staff to enable him to walk as well as anyone who can see.⁹² Callimachus recounts this story in fuller detail in his fifth *Hymn*, the *Bath of Pallas*, reporting that the incident occurred as Athena was bathing during the midday heat in Hippocrene (the Horse's Spring) on Mt Helicon in Boeotia. She was accompanied by a single companion, the nymph Chariclo, who was a particular friend of hers. When the young Teiresias, who was out hunting on the mountain with his dogs, happened to come to the spring to quench his thirst, he saw Athena naked and was told by her that he would be deprived of his eyesight forever. Chariclo cried out in reproach and distress, asking if this was what was meant by the friendship of a goddess; but Athena assured her that she was not to blame for her son's blindness because the laws of Cronos (i.e. divine law) ordained that the punishment must follow from the offence. Although she consequently had no power to alter Teiresias' fate in that regard, she told Chariclo to cease from her laments because she would confer benefits on him that would far outweigh his loss, by granting him prophetic powers, a long life, and an unimpaired mind after his death.⁹³ While recounting this story, Callimachus refers to the comparable story of Actaion, who suffered an even worse punishment after seeing Artemis naked (see p. 335);⁹⁴ it is likely that one of these two stories inspired the development of the other, but we cannot tell for sure which was of earlier origin.

In Attic tragedy and the later tradition (and doubtless in early epic too, although we have no definite evidence on the matter), Teiresias was said to have performed valuable services for Thebes and the Theban kings at various stages in the troubled history of the city. When Thebes was about to be attacked by the Seven, for instance, he revealed that there was only one means by which the city could be saved, since the blood-guilt for the sacred dragon (see p. 332–3) still weighed heavily on it, namely that a descendant of the Spartoi who was still a virgin should sacrifice his own life at the spot where the dragon had been killed, so as to atone for its death and finally allay the anger of Ares. MENOICEUS, son of Creon, who alone answered to these specifications, resolved to take this action for the sake of the city in spite of his father's opposition, and stabbed himself accordingly on the city walls, ensuring that he would fall into the former lair of the dragon below. This legend and, indeed,

Menoiceus himself first appear in *The Phoenician Women* of Euripides.⁹⁵ Teiresias plays a central role in three other surviving plays from the same period. In Euripides' *The Bacchae*, he vainly attempts to persuade Pentheus to stop opposing Dionysos and his cult;⁹⁶ in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, as we have seen, he reluctantly reveals that Oedipus himself is to blame for the plague that has fallen on Thebes; and in Sophocles' *Antigone*, he warns Creon that the gods have been angered by his decree forbidding the burial of Polyneices and by his subsequent treatment of Antigone. In the dramatic context, the seer tends to be greeted with disbelief or scorn when he first offers his advice or revelations. It is recorded elsewhere, among other things, that he advised Laios to appease Hera for having abducted the young Chrysippos; that he told Amphitryon that Zeus had assumed his form to sleep with his wife (see p. 236); and that he revealed the destiny that awaited Heracles after the infant hero first demonstrated his prowess by strangling two snakes (see p. 238).

Teiresias met his long-delayed death when the glory of his city was brought to an end by the victory of the Epigonoι. As he was fleeing the area along with most of the other citizens, he stopped to drink at the spring of Tilphousa (see p. 136) in western Boeotia, and expired as he was doing so, apparently because of the chill of the water. His tomb could be seen beside the spring.⁹⁷ He had a daughter MANTO (Divineress) who was captured at Thebes by the Epigonoι and sent to Delphi along with other plunder, animate and inanimate, as an offering to Apollo; for they had vowed to dedicate the finest of the spoils to the god if they conquered the city.⁹⁸ Some said that Teiresias was captured too and sent off for Delphi along with his daughter, but died on the way at Tilphousa.⁹⁹

Apollo was able to make good use of Manto by sending her over to Claros, near Colophon on the west coast of Asia Minor, to found the celebrated oracle of Apollo Clarios. In the earliest version of the story, which goes back to early epic, his oracle at Delphi instructed her to marry whomever she first met on emerging from the oracle, and this turned out to be a Mycenaean called Rhacios, who accepted her as his wife and took her across the sea to the site of Claros, a journey that would have been difficult for a woman on her own. On arriving there, she wept at the sad fate of her ravaged city, hence the origin of the name of Claros, here interpreted as being derived from *klain*, to weep. It was said that a spring was formed from her tears, presumably the sacred spring from which the prophet of the oracle used to drink before delivering his prophecies.¹⁰⁰ In another account, Rhacios was a Cretan who had already established himself in the region of Colophon with a group of settlers from Crete; and when Manto and some other Theban captives crossed over to Asia at the order of the Delphic oracle, they were captured by some of these Cretans and taken to Rhacios, who asked Manto to become his wife and invited the other Thebans to become citizens of his colony.¹⁰¹ Manto bore a son MOPSOS to Rhacios (or else to Apollo), who became a celebrated seer like his mother and grandfather, serving as the prophet of Clarian Apollo.¹⁰² For the story of his contest with another great seer, Calchas, see p. 500.

In a lost play by Euripides, *Alcmaion in Corinth*, Alcmaion was said to have fathered two children by Manto, a son Amphilochos and a daughter Tisiphone. He entrusted them to Creon, king of Corinth, to be reared, but Tisiphone grew up to be

so beautiful that the king's wife began to imagine that her husband might fall in love with her, and sold her into slavery for fear of being displaced. As chance would have it, Tisiphone was purchased by Alcmaion, who kept her as a maidservant without realizing that she was his daughter. The truth finally emerged, however, when he returned to Corinth to recover his two children. Since this story conflicts with Manto's usual legend, and there is no previous record of Tisiphone or the present Amphilochos (who is evidently a doublet of Amphilochos, son of Amphiaraos, see p. 361), there is good reason to suppose that this story was invented by Euripides himself.¹⁰³

How the Theban Wars affected the dynastic history of Argos

Since many members of the three royal families that ruled the non-Pelopid lands of the Argolid were killed in the Theban Wars or as a result of them, this inevitably had a major effect on the dynastic history of the region. It will be remembered that there were three such families, the **Proitids**, who were descended from Proitos as members of the old Inachid ruling family (see [Chapter 10](#) for its earlier history), the **Melampodids**, who were descended from the seer Melampous and were often gifted with divinatory powers, and the **Biantids**, who were descended from Bias, the brother of Melampous, who gained a share of the kingdom at the same time as him (see pp. 223ff.). Adrastus, the senior member of the Biantid family, was the most powerful ruler in the land at the time of the outbreak of the first Theban War. It will be the purpose of this final section of the chapter to summarize the effects that the two wars had on these three families, and to provide a sketch of their future history during the Trojan War and immediately afterwards. The Theban Wars were supposed to have taken place a generation or so before the Trojan War.

(i) *The Biantids during the time of the Theban Wars*

Adrastos, son of Talaos and grandson of Bias,¹⁰⁴ led the expedition of the Seven, and was accompanied on it by his brother **Mecisteus**, who was killed at Thebes. Another of the Seven, Parthenopaios, was sometimes classed as a further brother of his.¹⁰⁵ Aided by his divine horse Areion, Adrastus was the only man to survive from among the Seven, and he later marched against Thebes for a second time with the Epigonoι, although he was now too old to engage directly in the fighting. His only son **Aigialeus** and his nephew **Euryalos**, the son of the above-mentioned Mecisteus, were the leading warriors from the Biantid family on this second occasion. Aigialeus was killed in battle and the grief-stricken Adrastus died during the return journey. Since no male heir was left to inherit his throne, it passed through the female line to his grandson **Diomedes**, who had also marched with the Epigonoι. Diomedes was the only son of Tydeus, a member of the Aetolian royal family who had married Adrastus' daughter Deipyle after being exiled from his native land (see pp. 387–8). Tydeus was dead by this time, having been killed as one of the Seven. As a great warrior who inherited Adrastus' position as the overlord of the non-Pelopid lands of the Argolid, Diomedes would command the men from that region who took part in the Trojan War.

(ii) *The Melampodids during the time of the Theban Wars*

Amphiaraos, the only son of Oicles and a great-grandson of Melampous,¹⁰⁶ took part in the expedition of the Seven as the only member of his line who was available to do so. Although

he could foresee by his own prophetic powers that he would not return, his wife Eriphyle forced him to march off with Adrastus (see p. 355). His two sons **Alcamaion** and **Amphilochos** took part in the second Theban War, but although they survived, were not destined to play any significant role in the affairs of their native land after their return. For Alcamaion, who would have inherited his father's position as one of the rulers of the land in normal circumstances, had to depart into exile after killing his mother Eriphyle, to avenge her treatment of his father, and met his death abroad before the Trojan War in the circumstances described above (see p. 363). His two sons **Acarnan** and **Amphoterus** were born outside their native land accordingly and remained far away in Acarnania (see p. 363). Alcamaion's younger brother Amphilochos would seem to have lived in the Argolid after returning from the second Theban War, but in no prominent capacity; he was a seer like his father, and it is in that role that we next hear of him in a story set after the Trojan War.

(iii) *The Proitids during the time of the Theban Wars*

The old Argive royal family was represented among the Seven by **Capaneus**, son of Hipponoos, a descendant of Proitos in the fifth generation,¹⁰⁷ and by **Eteoclos** son of Iphis, a descendant of Proitos in the third or fourth generation; see Table 5. It will be noted that these genealogies are not properly synchronized with those of the other two families. Because Capaneus' father Hipponoos lived abroad as king of Olenos in Achaea, his father-in-law **Iphis**, the father of Eteoclos, was the senior member of this royal line within the Argolid at this period. Iphis suffered a triple bereavement during the first Theban War because he was not only deprived of his son and heir Eteoclos, who was killed in the fighting, and of his son-in-law Capaneus, who was struck by a thunderbolt (see p. 356), but also lost his daughter **Euadne** when she jumped on to the funeral pyre of her husband Capaneus (see p. 358).¹⁰⁸ The latter story first appears in Euripides' *Suppliants*, in which Iphis vainly attempts to dissuade her from following that course, and laments afterwards that nothing but desolation awaits him in his old age, for there will be no one left to greet him either in his own house or that of his son-in-law.¹⁰⁹ Capaneus left a son, **Sthenelos**, who took part in the second Theban War as one of the Epigonoι, and inherited the Proitid throne when Iphis died shortly before the Trojan War.

(iv) *The three families during the Trojan War*

Having inherited Adrastus' position as the most powerful ruler in this section of the Argolid, **Diomedes** was a powerful ruler of comparable rank to Agamemnon, and he led a large force of troops to Troy from Argos in eighty ships. He commanded this Argive force during the war with the assistance of two lieutenants, **Euryalos**, son of Mecisteus, who was of Biantid descent as we have seen, and **Sthenelos**, son of Capaneus, from the old Inachid royal family.¹¹⁰

DIOMEDES was a warrior of the first rank who is prominent throughout the *Iliad* both for his prowess in battle and for the advice that he offers to Agamemnon, particularly after the withdrawal of Achilles. He is specially favoured by Athena, like his father Tydeus before him, and she inspires him to dominate the fighting in the fifth book of the epic and even to confront deities. He is shot in the shoulder by Pandaros, but soon returns to the fray, kills Pandaros and others, and knocks Aineias to the ground by striking him with a stone; and when Aphrodite comes to the aid of this son of hers, he stabs her in the wrist with his spear, causing her to flee up to Olympus to seek a cure for the pain.¹¹¹ When he attacks Aineias again shortly afterwards, Apollo, who is now protecting him, pushes him back three times and warns him to not to measure himself against the immortal gods.¹¹² He subsequently

wounds Ares in the belly nonetheless, causing him to scream as loudly as nine or ten thousand men and flee up to Olympos for relief.¹¹³ In spite of his undoubted qualities, Diomedes is somehow a rather colourless figure who lacks the individual character of an Achilles, Ajax, or Odysseus, and does not come to life in one's imagination as they do.

By contrast to Diomedes, who is a leading figure in the *Iliad* during the absence of Achilles, EURYALOS appears on two occasions alone after being initially mentioned as a lieutenant of Diomedes, first in a short battle scene in which he kills two minor Trojans, and second when he is ignominiously defeated by Epeios in a boxing match during the funeral games for Achilles.¹¹⁴ In Polygnotos' mural of the sack of Troy, which would have been based on the epic tradition for the most part, Euryalos was shown among the injured with wounds to the head and wrist.¹¹⁵ This would suggest that he was thought to have returned home alive, and his supposed grave could be seen accordingly at Argos.¹¹⁶

STHENELOS, the other lieutenant of Diomedes, appears much more frequently in the *Iliad* than Euryalos, but only in a supporting role as the charioteer and closest comrade of Diomedes. The two had already fought at one another's side as Epigonoι. There is a memorable passage in the *Iliad* in which Agamemnon tries to spur on Diomedes by accusing him of being a worse fighter than his father, prompting Sthenelos to reply on his behalf that this can hardly be true since the Epigonoι captured Thebes, and with a lesser army too, after their fathers had perished in the attempt.¹¹⁷ It was generally accepted that Sthenelos returned home to Argos after the war (even if Lycophron states that he was buried at Colophon in Asia Minor).¹¹⁸ According to a local tradition at Argos, he brought a notable trophy back to the city, for he was awarded the effigy of Zeus Herceios that had stood in the courtyard of Priam's palace at Troy, and deposited it in the temple of Larisan Zeus on the acropolis at Argos, where it could be seen by visitors in historical times.¹¹⁹

Amphilochos, son of Amphiaraos, who was now the senior member of the Melampodid family, is never mentioned in the Homeric epics, but he must have been present at Troy, according to the subsequent tradition at least, because he appears in a story connected with the return journeys of the Greek warriors, as will be described below.

(v) *The three families after the Trojan War*

Although **Diomedes** returned safely to Argos and apparently continued to rule there without further incident in the early tradition, it was generally agreed from the Hellenistic period onwards that he was forced into exile when he arrived back and finally settled in Italy; for this Italian appendix to his mythology, see pp. 503–4. **Sthenelos**, the lieutenant of Diomedes from the old Argive royal family, made a safe return, as already mentioned, and took up his throne again as the local ruler in this line.

For an account of the subsequent mythical history of the area, as imagined in the later tradition after it had come to be accepted that Diomedes left for Italy, we may turn to Pausanias. While Sthenelos ruled as heir to the Proitid inheritance, **Cyanippos**, a late-invented grandson of Adrastos (see p. 518) inherited the position that had been occupied by the great Biantid ruler Adrastos and his successor

Diomedes. Sthenelos was succeeded by his son **Cylarabos** (or Cylarabes, or Cylasabos), who also inherited the Biantid share of the kingdom when Cyanippos died without an heir. And when Cylarabos himself died without an heir, the kingdom fell into the hands of **Orestes**, son of Agamenmon, the Pelopid king of Mycenae, and the whole of the Argolid was thus united under Pelopid rule, remaining so until the Heraclids mounted their successful invasion of the Peloponnese (see p. 281).¹²⁰ The grave of Cylarabos could be seen along with that of his father Sthenelos at the Cylarabis, a gymnasium at Argos that bore his name.¹²¹

It will be apparent from what has already been said that the other royal family, descended from Melampous, was not thought to have played any part in the affairs of Argos after the Trojan War. **Amphilochos**, the surviving son of Amphiaraos, had inherited the prophetic powers that were possessed by his father and other members of the family, and was remembered as a seer rather than as a ruler or warrior. After the war, he joined together with another seer to found an oracle in Asia Minor, making only a temporary and unsatisfactory visit to Argos during that period (see further on p. 500); and since he died in Asia soon afterwards, the Melampodid line that had ruled in Argos was then extinct.

Notes

¹ *Thebais* fr. 2 and 3 Davies.

² Soph. *Oed. Col.* 421ff, Eur. *Phoen.* 63–8 respectively.

³ Hellanic. 4F98.

⁴ Stes. 222b (Pap. Lille 76).

⁵ Pher. 3F96.

⁶ Eur. *Phoen.* 69–80, cf. Apollod. 3.6.1, D.S. 4.65.1; Hyg. *Fab.* 67 states that Oedipus ordered the alternation.

⁷ Eur. *Phoen.* 408–29, *Suppl.* 132–50.

⁸ Eur. *Phoen.* 427–9, Apollod. 3.6.1.

⁹ Hyg. *Fab.* 69, Apollod. 3.6.1. respectively.

¹⁰ Paus. 9.5.6.

¹¹ Hes. fr. 192.

¹² Hom. *Il.* 2.572.

¹³ Pi. *Nem.* 9.13–15 (flight from Argos) with schol. 20 and 30; Hdt. 5.67 (inherited Sicyonian throne as grandson of Polybos), Paus. 2.6.3 (as son-in-law of Polybos).

¹⁴ Apollod. 3.6.2, D.S. 4.65.6, schol. Pi. *Nem.* 9.30.

¹⁵ Pi. *Nem.* 9.24, *Ol.* 6.15.

¹⁶ For records of their names, see Aesch. *Seven* 375ff, Soph. *Oed. Col.* 1313ff, Eur. *Suppl.* 861ff, *Phoen.* 1090ff., D.S. 4.65.7, Apollod. 3.6.3, Paus. 10.10.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 70.

¹⁷ Apollod. 3.6.2, cf. Asclep. 12F29, D.S. 4.65.5–6; Hyg. *Fab.* 73 (Adrastos made the necklace and offered it to Eriphyle); earlier allusions to Eriphyle's treacherous acceptance of a bribe, Hom. *Od.* 11.326–7, 15.244–7, Soph. *El.* 837–9; Paus. 5.17.7–8 (episode portrayed on chest of Cypselos), *ibid.* 9.41.2 (tradition about necklace).

¹⁸ Hom. *Il.* 4.376–81.

¹⁹ Apollod. 3.6.4 and Hyg. *Fab.* 15 respectively.

²⁰ Apollod. 3.6.4, Hyg. *Fab.* 74, Hypoth. Pi. *Nem.* Odes; remains of Eur. *Hypsipyle*, ed. G.W. Bond, Oxford, 1963; earliest references to fate of Opheltes/Archemoros, Simon. 553, Bacch. 9.10–20; tomb of Opheltes, Paus. 2.15.3.

²¹ Hom. *Il.* 4.382–400, 5.802–8.

²² Apollod. 3.6.5

²³ D.S. 4.65.4.

²⁴ For a useful summary of the course of events, see Apollod. 3.6.7–8.

²⁵ Aesch. *Seven* 423–46, Eur. *Phoen.* 1172–86, *Suppl.* 496–9, Apollod. 3.6.7.

- 26 Aesch. *Seven* 807–19, Eur. *Phoen.* 1356–1424, Apollod. 3.6.8.
- 27 Pher. 3F97, Apollod. 3.6.8, Bacch. 41 (Athena planned to confer immortality on Tydeus), school. Pi. *Nem.* 10.12 (she made his son Diomedes immortal instead, as the dying hero requests in Pherecydes' account).
- 28 *Thebais* fr. 4 Davies (see Paus. 9.18.4, also citing a local tradition in which Parthenopaios was killed by a certain Asphodicos), Eur. *Phoen.* 1157–62, Apollod. 3.6.8 citing Euripides (mentions variant in which killed by Amphidicos, son of Astacos).
- 29 Pi. *Nem.* 9.24–7, 10.8–9, Eur. *Suppl.* 925–7, Apollod. 3.6.8; Paus. 5.17.8 (Baton on chest of Cypselos), 2.23.2 and 10.10.2 (on Baton).
- 30 Paus. 1.34.1–2 (Oropos), 1.34.2 and 9.19.4 (Harma); 9.8.2 (Cnopia); see also Str. 9.2.10 (oracle moved from Cnopia to Oropos).
- 31 *Thebais* fr. 6A Davies (see Paus. 8.25.8; line on Areion quoted), Apollod. 3.6.8, Hyg. *Fab.* 70.
- 32 Apollod. 3.6.8
- 33 Aesch. *Seven* 792–819.
- 34 E.g. Apollod. 3.7.1 (Creon succeeds as king, forbids burial), Paus. 9.5.6 (as regent for Laodamas).
- Aesch. *Seven* 914, 1002–4, cf. schol. Pi. *Ol.* 6.22, together at family burial-place. Paus. 9.18.3, near Proitian Gates, where honoured in hero-cult; when offerings were burned to them, so it was claimed, the flames and even the smoke would divide into two, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 68.
- 35 Where their supposed graves could be seen in historical times, Paus. 1.39.2; see also Hdt. 9.27, Plut. *Thes.* 29.
- 36 Pi. *Ol.* 6.15, *Nem.* 9.22–4.
- 37 As reported in Plut. *Thes.* 29.
- 38 Paus. 1.39.2.
- 39 Plut. *Thes.* 29.
- 40 Eur. *Suppl.* 934–7, 980–1.
- 41 Eur. *Suppl.* 990–1107, Apollod. 3.7.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 243.
- 42 Apollod. 3.7.1, Stat. *Theb.* 12.481ff.
- 43 Soph. *Antig.* 1–99.
- 44 Ibid. 162–445.
- 45 Ibid. 446–525 with 773–80 (Antigone's sentence).
- 46 Ibid. 526–81.
- 47 Ibid. 626–780.
- 48 Ibid. 928–1114.
- 49 Ibid. 1155–1358.
- 50 Pher. 3F95.
- 51 Aesch. *Seven* 1005–77.
- 52 Ibid. 1006.
- 53 Ibid. 1067ff.
- 54 Ion of Chios 740 *PMG*.
- 55 Hyg. *Fab.* 72.
- 56 Eur. *Antig.* fr.; address to Dionysos, fr. 177 Nauck.
- 57 Soph. *Antig.* 568ff, 626ff.
- 58 Paus. 9.25.2.
- 59 Paus. 9.18.2.
- 60 Mimnermus 21; Periclymenos as killer of Parthenopaios, *Thebais* fr. 4 Davies, as son of Poseidon, Eur. *Phoen.* 1156–7, etc.
- 61 Pher. 3F95.
- 62 Apollod. 3.7.2; Homer alludes to the expedition and its success, *Il.* 4.405–9.
- 63 Apollod. 3.7.2, Paus. 2.20.4 and 10.10.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 71, schol. *Il.* 4.404.
- 64 Apollod. 3.7.2, D.S. 4.66.3.
- 65 Pi. *Pyth.* 8.39–56.
- 66 Apollod. 3.7.3–4, cf. D.S. 4.66.3–5.
- 67 Hdt. 1.56; allusion to *Epigonoι*, *ibid.* 4.32.
- 68 Paus. 9.5.7, 9.8.3, 9.9.2, 9.19.2; Hdt. 5.61 (Thebans settled in land of Encheleis in Illyria).
- 69 Paus. 9.8.3.
- 70 Hellanic. 4F100.
- 71 Apollod. 3.7.4 (Epigonoι enter city, nothing stated on the succession), Paus. 9.5.7 (Thersandros becomes king).
- 72 Paus. 1.43.1 (Adrastos), 1.44.7 (Aigialeus).

- 73 Asclep. 12F29, D.S. 4.65.7, 4.66.2–3, Apollod. 3.7.5, Hyg. *Fab.* 73.
- 74 The best source for this oracle is Thuc. 2.102, cf. Paus. 8.24.8; the text of our main narrative, Apollod. l.c., is imperfectly preserved at the relevant point.
- 75 For the whole preceding story, Apollod. 3.7.5–7; cf. Paus. 8.24.8–10 (sons of Phegeus here called Temenos and Axion), Ov. *Met.* 9.407–17.
- 76 Paus. 9.5.7–8, 3.15.8.
- 77 Paus. 9. 5.8.
- 78 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 79 Hom. *Il.* 2.494–510.
- 80 Paus. 9.5.8.
- 81 Hom. *Od.* 10.493–5.
- 82 Tzetzes. Lyc. 682, citing Hesiodic verses (= fr. 276); Tzetzes remarks that others said that Teiresias lived for nine generations.
- 83 Hom. *Od.* 10.490–5.
- 84 Apollod. 3.6.7.
- 85 Ibid., citing Hesiod (under fr. 275 with relevant texts).
- 86 Hes. fr. 275.
- 87 Ovid. *Met.* 3.323–31.
- 88 Schol. *Od.* 10.494, Eustath. on *Od.* 10.492 (female snake, then male); Hyg. *Fab.* 75 (trampling mentioned as alternative), Vat. Myth. 1.16.
- 89 E.g. Cithairon in schol. *Od.* 10.494, Cyllene more often, e.g. Apollod. 3.6.7, Phlegon l.c.
- 90 This version in Apollod. only, doubtless through misinterpretation of the relevant lines of the *Melampodeia* (as cited in schol. Lyc. 683 and, in a slightly different form, in an interpolation in Apollodorus' text).
- 91 Apollod. 3.6.7, Phlegon l.c., Hyg. *Fab.* 75, schol. Lyc. 683 (all quoted under Hes. fr. 275).
- 92 Apollod. 3.6.7, citing Pherecydes (= 3F92).
- 93 Call. *Hymn* 5.57–130.
- 94 Ibid. 5.107–16, cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.131ff.
- 95 Eur. *Phoen.* 834ff; parting speech of Menoiceus, 987–1018, Creon laments his death, 1310–21. Cf. Apollod. 3.6.7, Hyg. *Fab.* 68.
- 96 Eur. *Bacch.* 266ff, cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.511ff.
- 97 Apollod. 3.7.3, cf. D.S. 4.67.1.
- 98 *Epigonoï* fr. 3 Davies, Apollod. 3.7.4, cf. D.S. 4.66.5–6 (here called Daphne).
- 99 Paus. 9.33.1 (also mentions that his tomb could be seen beside the spring).
- 100 *Epigonoï* fr. 3 Davies.
- 101 Paus. 7.3.1.
- 102 E.g. Paus. 7.3.1 (son of Rhacios), Apollod. *Epit.* 6.3 (son of Apollo).
- 103 Apollod. 3.7.7.
- 104 E.g. Apollod. 1.9.13.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 Paus. 1.28.7.
- 107 For descent of Capaneus, see schol. *Il.* 2.564, schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 181, (Hipponoos–Anaxagoras–Megapenthes–Proitos), schol. Pi. *Nem* 9.30 (Hipponoos here son of Megapenthes).
- 108 Eur. *Suppl.* 981ff, Apollod. 3.7.1.
- 109 Eur. *Suppl.* 1072ff.
- 110 Hom. *Il.* 2.559–68.
- 111 Ibid. 5.297–367.
- 112 Ibid. 5.431–42.
- 113 Ibid. 5.825–67.
- 114 Hom. *Il.* 6.20–8, 23.677–99.
- 115 Paus. 10.25.2.
- 116 Ps.Arist. *Peplos* 35.
- 117 Hom. *Il.* 4.403–10.
- 118 Lyc. 424–34.
- 119 Paus. 2.24.4–5.
- 120 Paus. 2.18.4–5.
- 121 Paus. 2.22.9–10.

The family of Deucalion and the hunt for the Calydonian boar

Apart from the Theban Wars, there were two other adventures that drew leading heroes together from different parts of Greece not long before the Trojan War, namely the voyage of the Argonauts and the hunt for the Calydonian boar. These latter adventures attracted participants from a wider range of places indeed than was the case with the Theban Wars, in which most of the participants came from Thebes and the Argolid, and they can thus be described as being truly Panhellenic in the same way as the last and greatest of these adventures, the Trojan War. The fathers of many Homeric heroes can be found accordingly among the Argonauts and boar-hunters, who embarked on their enterprises a generation or so before the Trojan War. The voyage of the Argonauts was thought to have been the earliest of these adventures, to be followed by the boar-hunt and then the Theban Wars, all within the same general period.

The hunt for the Calydonian boar was the most notable event in the mythical history of Aetolia, which lay in the south-western corner of the Greek mainland above the Gulf of Corinth. After having been mainly concerned with heroes and heroines of Inachid descent in the preceding chapters, we come into contact with another notable family in this chapter and the next, the great Deucalionid family, formed from the descendants of the primordial hero Deucalion, which ranks with that of the Inachids as one of the most extensive and important families in heroic mythology; for the Aetolian royal family was descended from Deucalion, as was Jason, the leader of the Argonauts, and Pelias, the Thessalian king who sent Jason to fetch the golden fleece. We will consider the myths of Deucalion himself, and the early history and general structure of the Deucalionid family, in the first part of this chapter, before turning our attention to the Aeolian branch of it in particular, and the Panhellenic adventure set in Aetolia, in the second part of the chapter. Three other branches of the family will be considered in the next chapter in connection with Jason and his quest.

Deucalion, son of Prometheus, the founder of the family, and his wife **Pyrrrha** were the central figures in the myth that was devised to account for the origin of the people of Eastern Locris in east-central Greece. After surviving a great primordial flood that inundated much of Greece, they created a new race of people there by

tossing stones over their shoulders; and they also produced various children by natural process, including **Hellen**, the eponym of the Greek people, the Hellenes. Hellen was in his turn the father or grandfather of Aiolos, Doros, Achaïos, and Ion, the eponyms of the four main divisions of the Greek people, the Aeolians, Dorians, Achaeans, and Ionians. None of these were of any significance as heroes of legend (apart from Ion to some limited extent). All the main heroes and heroines of the family were descended from **Aiolos** alone through his seven sons and one of his daughters.

Since the family of Aiolos was so large and his sons scattered to different parts of the Greek world, the Deucalionid family is more complicated in its structure than that of Inachids, which had only three main branches, all located in places of the first importance. Not only did Deucalionids come to establish ruling lines in a great variety of places of varying significance, but each of them tended to be prominent in mythical history for only a generation or two (in marked contrast to the Inachid lines in Thebes and Argos).

The Aetolian royal family was descended from Calyce, one of the daughters of Aiolos, as was the less important Eleian line that will be considered in connection with it. Calydon, the foremost city of Aetolia, was famous in myth as the home of Oineus and his son Meleager, who led the hunt for the Calydonian boar. All the other main branches of the family were descended from sons of Aiolos, including the three that will be considered in the next chapter. Apart from the ruling line established at Corinth by Sisyphos, most of the lines descended from the children of Aiolos were located in three areas, namely southern Thessaly, Aetolia and the western Peloponnese. The main Deucalionid kingdoms may thus be pictured as lying on a semicircle centred on the family's place of origin in Locris, extending from Thessaly to Aetolia in the south-western reaches of the mainland, and then across the Gulf of Corinth to Elis and Messenia.

Deucalion and his family

Deucalion and Pyrrha survive the great flood

DEUCALION, the first man of Central Greece and a survivor of the great flood, was a son of Prometheus, who was himself of divine birth as a son of the Titan Iapetos (see p. 46). Quite early reports suggest that his mother was an Oceanid nymph called Hesione¹ (although one might have thought that he would have been immortal if both of his parents were divine). He married his cousin PYRRHA, who was the only child of Epimetheus, the foolish brother of Prometheus who married the first woman Pandora.² Since Pandora was a creation of the gods (see p. 87), Pyrrha was the first woman who was born on the earth by natural process.

When the myth of the great flood was introduced from the Near East, Noah's role (or something broadly comparable) was assigned to Deucalion as a hero from the suitably remote past. The earliest full account to survive in any Greek source is that offered by Apollodorus, which runs as follows. In response to a warning from his

father Prometheus, who knew that Zeus was planning to send a flood to destroy the race of bronze (a violent race of men who lived in the very earliest times, see p. 31), Deucalion constructed a large chest, loaded it with provisions, and climbed into it along with his wife. Zeus duly proceeded to pour an abundance of rain from the sky, causing most of Greece to be submerged and every human being to be destroyed apart from a few who found refuge on the highest mountains; but Deucalion and Pyrrha floated safely in their chest for nine days and nights, eventually drifting ashore on Mt Parnassos. After the rains ceased, Deucalion climbed out and offered a sacrifice to Zeus Phyxios (of Escape). When Zeus then sent Hermes to him to offer him the choice of whatever he most desired, he asked to be provided with a new race of people. He was told that this would come to pass if he and his wife picked up some stones and threw them over their shoulders; and when they did so, the stones thrown by Deucalion turned into men while those thrown by Pyrrha turned into women.³

Pindar is the first author to refer directly to the flood, telling how the mighty waters overflowed the dark earth until they suddenly ebbed away through the devices of Zeus; Deucalion and Pyrrha descended from Mt Parnassos afterwards to settle at Opous in Eastern Locris, where they brought new people into being by the means just described.⁴ The stone-throwing is also mentioned in a Hesiodic fragment, which states that the people who were brought into being in this way were the Leleges (i.e. the aboriginal inhabitants of Eastern Locris, the province of Central Greece that lay opposite the northern part of the island of Euboea).⁵ As Pindar indicates, this part of the story was inspired by an etymological fancy, since *laas*, the Greek word for a stone, bears a deceptive similarity to the word *laos*, meaning people. Although Deucalion was thought to have lived in Locris in the earliest tradition, authors from the Hellenistic period often place him somewhat further north in Thessaly, and describe him accordingly as king of Phthia or even of the land as a whole.⁶ Hellanicus states correspondingly that he was washed ashore on Othrys, a mountain in southern Thessaly, rather than on Parnassos in Central Greece.⁷ Athenian tradition claimed that he took refuge at Athens at the time of the flood, and even that he was buried there in a tumulus near the sanctuary of Olympian Zeus, which he was supposed to have founded.⁸ As to the cause of the flood, Apollodorus states, as we have seen, that Zeus sent it to destroy the people of that era, as identified with the vicious bronze race in Hesiod's myth of the races (although the people of that race perished through their own violence in Hesiod's account, see p. 31); while others suggest that Zeus sent the flood to punish human iniquity, which is not so very different, or to avenge the crime of Lycaon or of his sons (see pp. 544–5).⁹

As originally conceived in Greek myth, the great flood was a local affair that affected mainland Greece alone; and correspondingly, the stone-throwing was not designed to explain how all or much of the world came to be repopulated, but to account for the origin of a particular people of east-central Greece, the above-mentioned Leleges. In Roman accounts, however, the flood is transformed into a universal deluge that covered the entire world, leaving only a few mountain tops (or Parnassos alone) still exposed. According to Ovid, Zeus was so shocked by the crime

of Lycaon and human iniquity in general that he decided to eliminate the present race to replace it with a new one. Although he initially intended to achieve this by hurling thunderbolts at every part of the earth, he feared that he might set fire to the heavens if he adopted that course, and resorted to the use of water instead. The Nereids were soon amazed to see groves and towns beneath the sea, and dolphins took possession of the woods and knocked against the tops of oak trees, and birds dropped into the sea in exhaustion for want of anywhere to settle. Everyone drowned or died of starvation until no mortal was left alive apart from Deucalion and Pyrrha, who sailed through the waters in a little boat until they ran ashore on Parnassos; and Zeus was contented that they should survive because he knew of their virtue and piety. So he drove away the storm-clouds with the help of the North Wind, while Poseidon settled the waves with his trident and called on Triton to blow his conch-shell horn to recall the waters to their proper courses. On seeing that they were all alone in the world, Deucalion and Pyrrha sought an oracle from Themis, who instructed them to throw the bones of their great mother over their shoulders. Although they were initially mystified by this reply, Deucalion came to recognize that it referred to the stones in the body of Mother Earth, and the couple duly set to work to bring a new race of mortals into being.¹⁰

Hellen and the eponyms of the four main divisions of the Hellenic people

In addition to the children whom they brought into being through their stone-throwing, Deucalion and Pyrrha also brought children into the world in the normal way. According to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, they had a single son, Hellen, the eponym of the Hellenes, and two daughters, Thuia and Pandora.¹¹ In the subsequent tradition, they also came to be credited with a further daughter, Protogeneia (see further on p. 380), and a son Amphictyon, who was the eponymous founder of the Amphictyonic League, an important religious association centred in east-central Greece.¹²

Before the Greeks in general came to be known by that name, the Hellenes were originally a particular tribe of Greeks who lived in southern Thessaly, near Deucalion's homeland. They still figure as such in the *Iliad*, which mentions them among the people who were commanded at Troy by Achilles, who came from Phthia in the same region.¹³ Although Homer uses the word 'Panhellenes' on one occasion,¹⁴ he commonly refers to the Greeks as Achaeans, Argives, or Danaans. The genealogical scheme that is developed, however, for Deucalion's immediate descendants in the *Catalogue* rests on the assumption (as we will see) that Hellen is to be regarded as the eponym of the Greeks in general, in accordance with what would become the standard usage. Instead of following that native usage, the Romans referred to the Hellenes as Graeci, using a name based on that of the Graicoi, a Hellenic people who lived to the west of the Homeric Hellenes, hence our modern use of the term Greek. Deucalion's daughter Pandora (who should be distinguished of course from the first woman) was presented in the *Catalogue* as having borne Graicos, the eponym of the Graicoi, to Zeus, while his other daughter, Thuia, was the mother of Magnes, the eponym of Magnesia in northern Thessaly.¹⁵

In the later tradition, however, Magnes was usually said to have been one of the many sons of Deucalion's grandson Aiolos (see p. 380).

If Hellen is the eponym of the Greeks in general, his sons and grandsons serve in this Hesiodic genealogical scheme as the eponyms of the four main divisions of the Greek people. For the Greeks considered that the Hellenic race could be divided into four main groups, the Aeolians, Dorians, Achaeans, and Ionians, as distinguished by differences of dialect, history, distribution, institutions, and so forth; and this is expressed here in genealogical terms through the idea that Hellen fathered **Aiolos**, **Doros**, and Xouthos by his wife, the nymph Orseis, and that Xouthos in turn fathered **Achaïos** and **Ion**.¹⁶ The eponyms of the Achaeans and Ionians were separated off together in this way, as members of a subsequent generation, because the Achaeans and Ionians were thought to be more closely related to one another than to the Aeolians and Dorians.

It was of course appreciated that the different tribal groups had not always lived in the same regions, and that the pattern of distribution in classical times was the outcome of a long and complicated process of migration. We are to imagine that Hellen lived in the district of Phthiotis in southern Thessaly, the home of the Hellenes in the *Iliad*, and that he was succeeded there by Aiolos, whose children and descendants would scatter to various parts of the adjoining mainland and western Peloponnese. Doros could be imagined as having settled in northern Thessaly, which was regarded as the original homeland of the Dorians, or in the little province of Doris in Central Greece, which was also associated with them. Hellen's other son, Xouthos, was said to have gone away to Athens, the most important Ionian city, where he married an Athenian princess and fathered Ion and Achaïos by her.

Doros, Ion, and Achaïos would originally have been little more than eponyms; for not only would they have had no legends, but they would also have been of little significance genealogically because all the main subsequent branches of the Deucalionid family were presented in this scheme as having been descended from Aiolos. For that reason, Aiolos will be considered separately in the next section in relation to those other branches of the family.

DOROS had a single son, AIGIMIOS, who was of some importance in legend for the connections that he was supposed to have established with Heracles. As was described in [Chapter 11](#), this came about because Heracles supported him in a war that he was fighting against the Lapiths, a warlike people of northern Thessaly. This would indicate that the Dorians were still living in those northern parts at the time, before moving to Doris; it was explained that they moved there after Heracles expelled the original inhabitants, the Dryopians (see p. 266). The ties that were established in this way would prove to be firm and enduring, for when the Heraclids (sons and descendants of Heracles) set out to invade the Peloponnese, they did so with the support of the Dorians, who accompanied them as allies and finally settled there under their rule. This mythical account of the Dorian migration is discussed in [Chapter 12](#) in connection with the return of the Heraclids. Aigimios had two sons, Dymas and Pamphylos, who were the eponyms of two of the Dorian tribes, the Dymanes and Pamphyloi. Hyllos, son of Heracles, the initial leader of the Heraclids, who was sometimes said to have become an adoptive son of Aigimios, came to be

regarded as the eponym of the third tribe, the Hylleis (even if only on the basis of an accidental resemblance between the two names).¹⁷

Ion and Achaïos and their descendants

Although Xouthos, the third son of Hellen was born in Thessaly like his brothers, he had to depart into exile and settled in Athens. According to one account, he was driven out as the result of a quarrel that developed between his brothers, who accused him of having stolen from their joint inheritance; or else he was obliged to settle abroad because Hellen bequeathed his throne to his eldest son Aiolos, ordering his other sons to seek their fortune elsewhere. Xouthos received a friendly reception from the Athenian king, Erechtheus, winning his favour according to Euripides by helping him in a war against the Euboeans. Erechtheus offered his daughter Creousa to Xouthos, and she bore him two sons, ION and ACHAIOS.¹⁸ His marriage to this Athenian princess, first mentioned in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*,¹⁹ was devised to connect Ion's birth with Athens, which liked to regard itself as the mother-city of the Ionians. As for Ion's brother Achaïos, it could be imagined that he went back to the region where his father had been born, to give his name to Phiotian Achaea in southern Thessaly (although he was also associated with the northern Peloponnesian province of Achaea in the later tradition, as we will see).

It was difficult to find any further place for Xouthos and Ion in the mythical history of Athens. Although Ion was sometimes said to have been offered the throne after helping the Athenians to victory in war or simply because of his personal qualities, he could not easily be fitted into the succession and was not included in the standard king-lists. It was thus more often claimed that he served the Athenians as a military commander, most particularly in their war against Eumolpos and the Eleusinians (see p. 323), which was usually said to have taken place during the reign of Erechtheus.²⁰ His supposed grave could be seen at Potamoi in southern Attica.²¹ According to Herodotus, the four tribes of early Athens (prior to the reforms of Cleisthenes) were named after Ion's four sons, Geleon, Aigicores, Argades, and Hoples.²²

In a surviving play, the *Ion*, Euripides offers a wholly distinctive account of Ion and his family, in which he is portrayed as a son of Apollo who ruled at Athens as the successor of Xouthos, here regarded as having been no more than his adoptive father. Since the story in this play, which may have been largely invented by Euripides himself (unless the lost *Creousa* of Sophocles contained something similar), conflicted too sharply with the usual traditions about the Athenian succession to have been accepted as anything more than a dramatic fiction, it will be best to consider it in the present context rather than in relation to the myths of early Athens.

In this version of the family history, Creousa was raped by Apollo in a cave under the Acropolis before her marriage to Xouthos, and exposed the resulting child in the cave at birth, keeping the whole matter secret from her father in accordance with the god's instructions. Although she naturally supposed that the infant would die, Hermes recovered him at Apollo's request and carried him away to Delphi, where he was reared as a temple-servant at the shrine of Apollo.²³ In the meantime, Creousa

married Xouthos, who had fought as an ally of her father Erechtheus and came to succeed him as king of Athens. As the years passed by, Creousa failed to produce any children, and the couple eventually travelled to Delphi to consult the oracle of Apollo.²⁴ Xouthos was told that the first person whom he met on going (*iōn*) out of the temple should be accepted by him as his son; and when this turned out to be the young temple-servant, Xouthos duly claimed him as his son, naming him Ion in reference to the circumstances of their meeting. He assumed that this must be a child whom he had fathered during Bacchic revels at Delphi before his marriage to Creousa.²⁵ Having no idea that her own child had survived, Creousa naturally assumed the same, and tried to kill Ion with some poisoned wine out of jealousy. Before he could drink it, however, he was alerted by a bad omen and poured it on to the ground, and when a dove suddenly died after sipping the spilt fluid, he came to realize that somebody had been plotting his death.²⁶ After forcing the truth out of a servant, Ion set out to kill Creousa, but was prevented by the intervention of Apollo's priestess from Delphi. When she revealed his true origin by producing the cradle in which he had been exposed by Creousa, a reconciliation was established between the mother and son; and Athena then appeared and ordered Creousa to take Ion home with her, and to allow Xouthos to continue to believe that Ion was his own son.²⁷ The goddess declared that Xouthos himself would father two children by Creousa, Achaïos and Doros(!), and that Ion would later succeed to the throne and father four sons who would give their names to the tribes of Athens (see above); these would in turn father sons who take part in the colonization of the Cyclades and the coast of Asia Minor.²⁸

The standard legendary account of the Ionian settlement of Asia Minor was set at a very late period of the mythical history of Greece, well after the Trojan War and two generations after the Heraclids made their final return to the Peloponnese. It was naturally assumed that the settlers had set out from Athens, as the greatest Ionian city. As was described at the end of [Chapter 12](#), the leaders of the enterprise were supposed to have been sons of the last king of Athens, Codros, who was of Heraclid descent; see further on p. 265. In recounting the events that were supposed to have led up to the founding of the Ionian settlements in Asia, Pausanias provides a detailed account of the history of Xouthos and his descendants, which is as distinctive in its different way as that of Euripides, being in this case a pseudo-historical narrative of late invention that was devised to account for the origin of most of the 'Ionians' who accompanied the sons of Codros to Asia. For it describes them as being Peloponnesian descendants of Ion whose families had settled at Athens in the time of Codros' father, after having been forced out of their original home as a result of the Dorian invasion of the Peloponnese.

In this narrative we are told that Xouthos was asked to arbitrate on the Athenian succession after the death of his host Erechtheus, and that his decision in awarding the throne to the king's eldest son, Cecrops, so enraged the other Athenian princes that they drove him out of the land. So he had to leave with his two sons and settled in Aigialos ('the Coast-land'), the coastal province of the northern Peloponnese that would later be known as Achaea.²⁹ After his father's death, Ion raised an army to make war against the current ruler of the land, while his brother Achaïos decided to

go to his ancestral homeland in Thessaly. In the face of the threat from Ion, Selinous, the king of Aigialos, decided to seek a compromise by offering him his daughter, Helice, as a wife and agreeing to adopt him as his heir (for he had no sons of his own). On ascending to the throne, Ion founded Helice, the principal city of the land (which was submerged by a tidal wave in Hellenistic times), and named his people Ionians after himself.³⁰

His brother Achaïos established himself in the part of Thessaly that was known thenceforth as Achaea, and it was only as a result of an indirect process that he gave his name to the Peloponnesian Achaea. For Aigialos and its Ionian inhabitants continued to be ruled by descendants of Ion, until the land eventually came to be conquered by some descendants of Achaïos and their 'Achean' subjects. This came about at the time of the return of the Heraclids, as a result of the following sequence of events. Two sons of Achaïos, named Archandros and Architeles, decided to leave the Thessalian Achaea to make their home in the Peloponnese, where they married two daughters of Danaos, king of Argos; and since they came to rule over Argos and Sparta, evidently in succession to their father-in-law, the people of those lands came to be known as Achaeans. When Teisamenos, king of Argos and Sparta, who was of course a Pelopid (see p. 520) but is presented here as ruling over these Achaean subjects, was expelled by the Heraclids and their Dorian allies several generations later, the banished king led his 'Achaeans' north to Aigialos and tried to reach a peaceful settlement with the descendants of Ion who ruled the land. Fearing however that Teisamenos would be chosen as supreme ruler if the two populations were allowed to merge, the Ionian princes resorted to war; but although Teisamenos himself was killed, his Achaeans prevailed and forced their opponents into exile. So Aigialos fell under Achaean control and came to be known as Achaea, while the 'Ionians' sought refuge at Athens, where they received a friendly welcome because of the services that Ion had performed for the city long ago. They arrived during the reign of Melanthos, the father of Codros, and it was from them that the sons of Codros recruited most of their Ionian followers when they set off to colonize Asia Minor (see p. 285). It hardly needs saying that all of this is an arbitrary invention, which was not based on ancient tradition, and often stands in direct conflict with it.³¹

Aiolos, son of Hellen, and his sons and daughters

AIOLOS, the eponym of the Aeolians, who would have lived in southern Thessaly, married Enarete, daughter of Deimachos, and fathered a large family of seven sons and five daughters.³² He was thus of far greater importance as a genealogical link than any of his brothers or nephews. Although two of his sons remained in Thessaly, most of them settled elsewhere, either in Boeotia or further south in Corinth, or in the western Peloponnese. The other main branch of the family, which ruled in Aetolia and Elis, was descended from one of his daughters, as we will see. Although we will be concerned primarily with that branch in the present chapter, it may be helpful to offer a general outline of the nature of the family, starting with the sons of Aiolos.

- (i) **Athamas** was a much-married Boeotian ruler who was of significance above all for the part that he played in the story that accounted for the origin of the golden fleece, and he and his family will thus be considered in connection with the myth of the Argonauts (see pp. 392ff.). The infant Dionysos was also said to have been reared by him and one of his wives, Ino (see p. 164). He was notable for the stories that were told about him and his immediate family rather than for having been the founder of a dynasty.
- (ii) **Cretheus** was the founder of Iolcos in Thessaly, and the grandfather of Jason, who was sent by Pelias to fetch the golden fleece. Although Pelias succeeded Cretheus as king of Iolcos, he was not a son of Cretheus himself, but had been borne to Poseidon by his wife before she had married him; and the fact that the throne passed to Pelias rather than to Cretheus' eldest son Aison, the father of Jason, was a crucial factor in the sequence of events that would lead Pelias to send Jason on his dangerous mission, see further on pp. 395ff. Through his son Pheres, Cretheus was also the ancestor of another Thessalian ruling line (see p. 397), and through another son, Amythaon, the ancestor of an important family of seers and Argive rulers (see pp. 222ff).
- (iii) **Salmoneus**, who founded a city in Elis, was remembered for the impieties that condemned him and his city to early destruction; his daughter Tyro survived, however, to become the mother of Pelias and wife of Cretheus, and his history and the subsequent life of his daughter will thus be considered in connection with the Argonauts, see p. 396.
- (iv) **Perieres** settled in Messenia in the south-western corner of the Peloponnese and founded the old Messenian royal family, see p. 448. One of his sons offered refuge to Neleus, the twin brother of Pelias, when he was expelled from Thessaly by his brother, and for reasons that will be explained on p. 451, Neleus' son Nestor came to be the most powerful ruler in Messenia by the time of the Trojan War.
- (v) **Sisyphe** was the cunning founder of the Corinthian royal family (see p. 553), of which Bellerophon was the other most notable member (see p. 221).
- (vi) And finally there are two brothers of lesser note, the first of whom, **Deion**, was associated with Phocis in Central Greece and founded the family from which Protesilaos, the first Greek victim of the Trojan War, was descended (see p. 466).
- (vii) **Magnes** for his part was the eponym of the Thessalian coastal province of Magnesia, and was the father of Polydectes, king of Seriphos, and his brother Dictys, who played an important role in the legend of Perseus (see pp. 226ff.).

To pass on to the daughters of Aiolos, one of them, **Calyce**, was of comparable genealogical significance to his sons as ancestor of the Eleian and Aetolian royal families, while **Alcyone** achieved fame in another way as the heroine of a transformation myth (see below). His three other daughters are of less interest. **Peisidice** married Myrmidon, the eponym of the Myrmidons, the warlike people who were commanded at Troy by Achilles. She bore him a son Actor who succeeded him as ruler of the Myrmidons at Phthia in Thessaly, to be followed by his own son Eurytion, who received Peleus, the father of Achilles, into his kingdom, see pp. 428–9.³³ **Canace** for her part bore a number of children to Poseidon, including Aloeus, the father of the gigantic Alodai (see p. 84), and Triopas, the father of the ill-fated Erysichthon (see p. 114),³⁴ while **Perimede** bore two children to the Aetolian river-god Acheloos, including Hippodamas, a grandfather of Oineus (see p. 382).³⁵

To return to **ALCYONE**, she appeared in a famous transformation myth along with her husband, **CEUX**, son of Heosphoros. They called one another Zeus and Hera, so it was said, arousing the anger of Zeus, who punished their impious presumption by turning them into birds, Alcyone into a mythical sea-bird, the halcyon, and Ceux

into a sea-bird of uncertain identity that bore his name.³⁶ Or in another version of their story, recounted by Ovid among others, Ceux was drowned in a shipwreck and Alcyone mourned for him inconsolably, or even jumped into the sea in her distress, and so aroused the pity of the gods, who transformed her and her husband alike into halcyons.³⁷ Halcyons were supposed to nest beside the sea or even on its waves during the 'halcyon days' of winter. It was said that Zeus imposed this calm, lasting a week or a fortnight, because he had felt sorry at seeing the offspring of the transformed Alcyone being carried away by the waves; or in Ovid's version, in which Alcyone's father is identified with the Aiolos in the *Odyssey* who was keeper of the winds, Aiolos restrains the wind for a week each year to provide a smooth sea for his avian descendants.³⁸

Legends of Aetolia and the hunt for the Calydonian boar

Endymion and his family in Elis

CALYCE, daughter of Aiolos, married Aethlios, the first king of Elis, to found the Eleian royal family, and also, through a side-branch, the Aetolian royal family, which was of far greater importance in myth. As a son who had been borne to Zeus by Protogeneia, daughter of Deucalion, Aethlios was of Deucalionid descent like his wife. He and Calyce had only a single son, ENDYMION, who succeeded him as king of Elis, the north-western province of the Peloponnese.³⁹ Or, in a rather different account in which Endymion was born in Thessaly, it was he who established himself as first king of Elis after having led some Aeolian followers to the land.⁴⁰

Endymion is of interest in two respects, for the romantic tales that told of his love affair with the moon-goddess Selene, which ended in his eternal sleep, and for the part that he played in the dynastic history of Elis. Although it was commonly agreed that the goddess fell in love with him and that he sank into that everlasting sleep for some reason, the tradition is poorly attested and is inconsistent with regard to both matters. According to one account, Zeus offered him the choice of whatever he most desired at Selene's request, and he asked to sleep forever so as to be exempted from the ravages of age, and indeed from death itself in its usual form;⁴¹ or else Zeus allowed him to choose the time and manner of his passing, and he asked to fall asleep forever at the moment of his choice.⁴² Or, since legend related that the moon-goddess Selene liked to visit him while he was asleep, it was suggested that she herself put him to sleep so as to be able to visit him at will and steal kisses from him.⁴³ There was also a version that explained the origin of his sleep in a quite different manner, by saying that he was admitted into the company of the gods and fell in love with Hera, to the annoyance of Zeus, who put an end to the matter by condemning him to eternal sleep.⁴⁴

Selene was so entranced by his beauty in any case that she used to make regular visits to him at night, whether to make love with him or simply to gaze at him while he lay asleep.⁴⁵ There was a tradition that claimed that the site of his everlasting

sleep and of her visits was a cave in Asia Minor, set in Mt Latmos to the south-east of Miletos. Some explained accordingly that he eventually left Elis to settle on the mountain, where his grave could be seen in historical times. The Eleians claimed for their part that his grave was located in their own land, near the starting-point for the foot-race at Olympia; although one might have thought that he would have had no grave at all if he had fallen asleep forever.⁴⁶ According to an Eleian tradition, Selene bore him fifty daughters.⁴⁷

It would seem that none of this prevented Endymion from ruling the kingdom or contracting a marriage. For after inheriting the throne from his father (or first founding the kingdom if he was born in Thessaly), he married a naiad nymph or a mortal woman who is variously named, and fathered three sons, Paion, Epeios, and AITOLOS. To decide who should be his successor, he told the three of them to race for the throne at Olympia, and Epeios proved victorious. Although Aitolos was content to remain in Elis under his brother's rule, Paion was so angry at being defeated that he went as far away as possible, settling in the region of northern Macedonia that was known as Paionia from that time onwards (but see also p. 393). Aitolos succeeded to the Eleian throne after the death of Epeios, but soon had to depart into exile in his turn as the result of an unfortunate accident, after running down a certain Apis, son of Phoroneus, or Iason, son of Pallantion, with his chariot. The accident occurred while he was attending the funeral games of the early Arcadian ruler Azan (see p. 548).⁴⁸

Since Endymion's daughter Eurycyde had borne a son, Eleios, to Poseidon, the throne now passed to Eleios, who gave his name to the land. Pausanias may be consulted for an account of the subsequent mythical history of Elis.⁴⁹ If one puts aside the body of legend associated with the Olympian Games, there are only two stories of any real interest, both recounted above, the tale of the conflict that arose between Heracles and Augeias, king of Elis, after the hero cleared the dung from the king's cattle-stalls as one of his labours (see pp. 248 and 262) and the story that told how Oxylos, a rather distant descendant of Aitolos, gained the Eleian throne by acting as guide to the Heraclids when they invaded the Peloponnese (see p. 280). Although Augeias, as a son of the sun-god Helios, did not really fit into the Eleian succession, the problem is resolved in Pausanias' pseudo-history of the land through a neat rationalization, for it is explained that Augeias was really a son of the aforementioned Eleios, but came to be thought to have been a son of Helios because the god's name sounds rather similar.⁵⁰

Aitolos founds the Aetolian branch of the Deucalionid family

Aitolos left the Peloponnese to settle in the south-western corner of the mainland, on the far side of the Corinthian Gulf. Although the local rulers, three obscure sons of Apollo called Doros, Laodocos, and Polypoites, offered him a friendly welcome, he killed them nevertheless to seize power in his own right and named the land Aetolia after himself.⁵¹ He married Pronoe, daughter of Phorbas, who bore him two sons, **Pleuron** and **Calydon**, who gave their names to the two main cities of the land. Pleuron's son **Agenor** married Calydon's daughter **Epicaste**, who bore him two

children, **Porthaon** and **Demodice** (or Demonice).⁵² The kings of Calydon, which became the greatest city of the land, were descended from Porthaon, while the kings of Pleuron were descended from Demodice through a son whom she bore to Ares.

PORTHAON married Euryte daughter of Hippodamas, and fathered several sons by her, most notably **Oineus**, who grew up to become the greatest Aetolian ruler as king of Calydon, and was the father of **Meleager**, the greatest hero of the land.⁵³ All the most important Aetolian myths, including that of the hunt for the Calydonian boar, are set in the time of Oineus and are connected with him and his immediate family. Of the other sons of Porthaon, only Agrios (the Wild) is worthy of mention, in so far as he was the father of the brutish Thersites, the ugliest man at Troy (see p. 475), and became king of Calydon for a while after the aged Oineus was deposed by his sons (see p. 388).

Although Porthaon's sister DEMODICE was so beautiful that she attracted many suitors, who promised her magnificent gifts, she yielded to none of them and bore four children to the god Ares instead, including **Euenos**, the father of Marpessa (see p. 147), and **Thestios**, who became king of Pleuron and was second only to Oineus for his power in the land.⁵⁴ His sons, the Thestiadae, played a prominent part in the hunt for the Calydonian boar, and then provoked a quarrel over the spoils that led to the death of Meleager (see p. 385). In the early epic version of the latter story, as we will see, the quarrel sparked off a full-scale war in which Pleuron was set against Calydon. Although this was the only legend associated with Thestios and his sons, Thestios was also of genealogical significance as the father of some highly important daughters. His daughter **Althaia** married Oineus and played a central part in the story of their son Meleager, as will be described in the next section, while **Leda** married Tyndareos, king of Sparta, and became the mother of Helen and the Dioscuri among others (see p. 447), and **Hypermnestrea** married an Argive ruler Diocles, to become the mother of the great seer Amphiaraios, who was one of the Seven against Thebes (see p. 355).

To gain a clearer picture of this branch of the Deucalionid family, it may be helpful to consult Table 10.

Oineus and his family at Calydon

OINEUS, king of Calydon, married ALTHAIA, daughter of Thestios, who bore him several sons, most notably Meleager, and two noteworthy daughters, Deianeira, who became the second wife of Heracles (see p. 264), and Gorge, who married Oineus' successor Andraimon.⁵⁵ As we will see (p. 388), all the other daughters of Oineus were said to have been transformed into birds while they were mourning for Meleager after his premature death. Although Meleager was by far the most important of the sons of Oineus, and is indeed the only one who stands out as an individual, he was not the first-born, for he originally had an elder brother called TOXEUS (Bowman), who was killed by his own father, so Apollodorus tells us, 'because he jumped over the ditch (*taphros*)'.⁵⁶ This story is of some interest because it might be interpreted as providing a Greek parallel for the Roman legend of Remus, who was killed for jumping over the walls of Rome while they were in the course of

construction (see p. 537), although one can hardly draw any definite conclusion from such a brief report. Meleager outlived his brother in any case to become the great hero of the family, even if he too was destined to meet an early death. It was sometimes suggested that he was really a son of Ares, evidently in view of his martial prowess.⁵⁷ The other sons of Oineus are empty names apart from Agelaos, who is mentioned by Bacchylides as a victim of the Calydonian boar.⁵⁸ None were available in any case to come to the aid of Oineus during the troubles of his old age or to inherit his throne.

In view of the fact that the name of Oineus simply means Wine-man, it is hardly surprising that there should have been tales that associated him with Dionysos and the introduction of wine. Apollodorus remarks that he was the first mortal to receive a vine from Dionysos,⁵⁹ and Hyginus provides a tale to explain how this came about. While visiting Oineus in Calydon, Dionysos fell in love with his wife Althaia, and when Oineus noticed that this was the case, he was considerate enough to remove himself from the scene on the pretext that he had to offer a sacrifice outside the city. So Dionysos went to bed with Althaia, causing her to conceive Deianeira; and he rewarded Oineus for his indulgent hospitality by giving him a vine and instructing him in its cultivation, and by decreeing that wine (*oinos* in Greek) should be named after him.⁶⁰ Or, according to another tale, a man called Staphylos who worked for Oineus as a herdsman noticed that one of his goats liked to eat the fruit of an unfamiliar plant, and would skip around in a friskier manner after doing so. On receiving some of this fruit from his herdsman, Oineus prepared a new drink from it and offered some to Dionysos, who then proceeded to instruct him in the cultivation of vines, and decreed that the drink should be named after him and that the fruit from which it was made (i.e. *staphyloi*, bunches of grapes) should be named after Staphylos.⁶¹

In his surviving myths at least, Oineus is not presented as a warlike figure, but as a gracious ruler who was always ready to offer hospitality and refuge to strangers from abroad. He took care of the young Agamemnon and Menelaos after their father was murdered (see p. 424), and offered refuge to Alcmaion when he was being persecuted by the Furies (see p. 363). The *Iliad* reports that he once entertained Bellerophon at his home for twenty days and exchanged splendid gifts with him;⁶² and Heracles stayed with him for some years after marrying his daughter Deianeira, until he and his wife finally had to leave as the result of an unfortunate accident (see p. 265).

Meleager and the hunt for the Calydonian boar

A most remarkable event occurred soon after the birth of MELEAGER (properly Meleagros in Greek), for either on the day of his birth or else seven days afterwards, at the time when a Greek child would normally be given its name, the Moirai (Fates) appeared to his mother ALTHAIA and revealed that his life would come to an end when a log that was burning in the hearth was fully consumed. In the earliest surviving reference to the log, in a poem by Bacchylides, it is merely mentioned that fate had ordained this, but Aeschylus states explicitly in the *Libation Bearers* that the

Fates visited Althaia to tell her.⁶³ Or in the relatively elaborate account by Hyginus, it was revealed to her by Atropos specifically, the Fate who cut the thread of life to bring people's lives to an end, after another sister had declared that Meleager would be noble-hearted, and another that he would be courageous.⁶⁴ Whatever the exact course of events, Althaia hastily removed the log from the fire and ensured that it was kept safe, shutting it up in a chest in most accounts. It appears that she kept the matter secret from everyone else, including her son. Although Apollodorus implies that Meleager was invulnerable as long as the log remained unburned, the crucial point of the story lay in the fact that it could be set alight again to cause his death.⁶⁵

Before engaging in the great adventure that would lead to his death, Meleager sailed with Jason and Argonauts,⁶⁶ and won a victory afterwards with his javelin at the funeral games for Pelias, the Thessalian king who had sent Jason on his mission.⁶⁷ His name appears in all surviving catalogues of the Argonauts. Since he was little more than an adolescent at the time, Oineus arranged for him to be accompanied by his maternal uncle Iphiclos and another uncle, Laocoon, who was a half-brother of Oineus himself. Maternal uncles often played a role in the initiation of young men. Meleager comes out well in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, killing two of the enemy during the battle with the Doliones (see p. 401), and even offering, young as he was, to perform the tasks that were set as a condition for the removing of the fleece (although they would ultimately be performed by Jason); the poet remarks that none of the Argonauts was superior to Meleager, him save Heracles alone.⁶⁸

Meleager was remembered above all, however, for having taken the lead in the hunt for the Calydonian boar, the great Panhellenic adventure that was set in his own land. This dangerous enterprise had become necessary as the result of an action committed – or rather, omitted – by his father, for when Oineus had offered the first-fruits of his harvest (or simply a general sacrifice) to all of the gods one year, he had failed to offer anything to Artemis, who was so angry that she sent a boar of unparalleled size and ferocity against the land. It uprooted the crops, destroyed the livestock and killed anyone who was unfortunate enough to encounter it.⁶⁹ In referring to this course of events, Homer, our earliest source for the story, professes not to know whether Oineus forgot the goddess or simply ignored her, but observes that he was greatly blinded in his heart in any case.⁷⁰ Although he tried to appease her as best he could, through sacrifices of many goats and red-backed oxen according to Bacchylides,⁷¹ her anger persisted unabated, and he finally summoned leading heroes from far and wide to hunt the boar, promising its hide as a prize of honour to the man who killed it.⁷²

Since the king was now too old to venture into the field in person, Meleager took command of the hunting party once it had been assembled; or else it was he who gathered it together in the first place, as in the Homeric account. Homer remarks that he had to gather huntsmen and dogs together from many places because a few men could not have brought down a boar of such size, which had already caused so many deaths;⁷³ but one can assume nonetheless that the hunt would have been regarded as a relatively local enterprise in the earliest tradition, and only subsequently have been developed into a Panhellenic enterprise, until almost every major hero of that generation finally came to be enlisted among the participants. As

has already been mentioned, the hunt was supposed to have taken place shortly after the voyage of the Argonauts, and many of the heroes who participated in these adventures were fathers of heroes who fought at Troy. Among those who came to be named among the boar-hunters were Jason and a number of former Argonauts; Theseus and his friend Peirithoos; Peleus, the father of Achilles; and his brother Telamon, the father of Ajax; and Ancaios and Cepheus from Arcadia; Idas and Lynceus from Messenia; the Dioscuri from Sparta; and Admetos and Eurytion from Thessaly. If Amphiaraos joined the hunt, as he did in one account, he was the only boar-hunter who went on to march against Thebes. Since such lists are in effect little more than inventories of the major heroes of the period, very few of whom have any specific stories ascribed to them in connection with the hunt, the exact content of the list is not a matter of any great concern. Apollodorus and Hyginus provide catalogues, as does Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. In addition to all these heroes, a notable heroine, Atalanta, arrived from Arcadia to attend the hunt, and played a leading part in it in most accounts.⁷⁴

Although the tale of the boar-hunt and the conflict that arose from it was almost as famous as the tale of the Argonauts, it so happens that no very full or worthwhile account has survived from Greek literature. For the course of the hunt itself, as pictured in the later tradition, Apollodorus and Ovid should be consulted first of all, together with the earlier though less complete account in Bacchylides' fifth Ode.⁷⁵ When the boar-hunters set off on their mission after nine days of feasting, Cepheus, Ancaios, and some of the other men were reluctant to take part in the company of a woman, but Meleager insisted that Atalanta should be allowed to come. As it turned out, she proved to be a more valiant and effective hunter than any of the men, apart from Meleager himself. According to Bacchylides, the hunt lasted for six days and the main victims of the boar were Ancaios (a redoubtable Arcadian who wore a bearskin and carried a double-headed axe, see p. 548) and Meleager's favourite brother Agelaos. Others who are named as victims in later sources are Ainesimos, who was a son of Hippocoon from Sparta, and a certain Hyleus⁷⁶ (and even, rather absurdly, Ixion and Telamon⁷⁷). Many more were wounded, and some were killed accidentally by fellow hunters, notably Eurytion, king of Phthia, who died at the hand of Peleus (see p. 428). Ovid mentions that dogs and hunting-nets were employed, as would be expected; the dogs can be seen much earlier in vase-paintings, which sometimes even attribute names to individual hounds.

It was generally agreed in the standard later tradition that the boar was killed by Meleager after first being wounded by Atalanta. According to Apollodorus, Atalanta landed the initial blow by shooting an arrow into its back, and Amphiaraos then proceeded to shoot it in the eye, leaving it for Meleager to deal the death-blow by stabbing it in the side; or in Ovid's account, Atalanta shot it beneath the ear, and Meleager finished it off by hurling a spear into its back and driving another spear through its shoulders.⁷⁸ The Hellenistic poet Lycophron departs from the usual pattern by suggesting that Ancaios killed the boar after being fatally wounded by it.⁷⁹

The death of Meleager

Although it might have been expected that all would have ended happily with the killing of the boar, the awarding of the trophies provided occasion for a violent disagreement that would result in the death of Meleager. It will be convenient to start by considering how both matters were represented in the standard later tradition, in which, as we have seen, the heroine Atalanta had come to be accorded a central role. It could be suggested accordingly that the present trouble arose because Meleager chose to award the spoils of the hunt to her. Euripides would seem to have offered some such version in his lost *Meleager*, and it is explained in the subsequent literature that Meleager awarded the hide and tusks of the boar to Atalanta instead of keeping them for himself as the slayer of the beast, either out of admiration for her valour and skill⁸⁰ or because he had fallen in love with her;⁸¹ and he thus inadvertently provoked a bitter quarrel with his maternal uncles, the sons of Thestios, king of Pleuron, who protested that the prize of honour should go to them by right of birth, rather than to a woman and a foreigner, if he chose not to take it for himself. When they proceeded from words to deeds by seizing the hide from Atalanta, Meleager flew into a rage and killed them, and so incurred his own destruction; for his mother Althaia was so furious to hear that he had killed her brothers that she rekindled the log on which his life depended, and he expired as soon as it was burnt away.⁸²

According to a further story, which was probably of pre-Hellenistic origin since Aeschylus seems to have known of it, his sisters were transformed into guinea-fowl (*meleagrides*) after his death. In the full account ascribed to Nicander, they wept for him so inconsolably that Artemis took pity on them and turned them into these birds with a touch of her wand, and then settled them on the island of Leros. She left Deianeira and Gorge unchanged, however, at the request of Dionysos, and they thus survived to marry Heracles and Andraimon respectively as ancient tradition demanded.⁸³ Diodorus and some late authors report that Althaia soon departed from the scene as well, since she came to feel remorse for having caused the death of her son and took her own life.⁸⁴ This was probably a fairly ancient feature of the tradition because, among other things, it had long been agreed that Oineus embarked on a second marriage after these events.

Matters follow a very different course in the earliest account in the *Iliad*, since the quarrel between Meleager and his uncles develops into a full-scale war, and there is no mention whatever of Atalanta or of the fateful log. Homer states without further detail that a quarrel developed between the Aetolians and the Couretes over the head and shaggy hide of the boar, which resulted in a war that went badly for the Couretes as long as Meleager still remained in the fray. These Couretes, who are mentioned elsewhere as the aboriginal inhabitants of Aetolia, may presumably be identified with the people who were under the rule of Thestios and his family, i.e. the Pleuronians, while their opponents were primarily the Calydonians. The course of the struggle changed when Meleager angered his mother by killing one of her brothers (or some of them, the text is ambiguous), for she cursed him, praying for his death, and he was so upset and enraged by this that he withdrew from the fighting,

and the tide then turned in favour of the Couretes, who launched an assault against Calydon and placed it under increasing threat. As the enemy pressed ever harder, the holiest priests were sent to Meleager by the elders to entreat him to return to the fighting and to offer him gifts if he would do so; and he was then visited in succession by his father, and his sisters, and Althaia herself, and his dearest comrades, but he remained obdurate until his wife Cleopatra reminded him of the miseries of death and enslavement that awaited the inhabitants of a fallen city. So he rejoined the fighting and won the day for his people.⁸⁵

It seems to have been generally accepted in the early epic tradition that a war of this kind developed. According to a fragment from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, Apollo shot Meleager while he was fighting against the Couretes outside Pleuron, and he is reported to have suffered the same fate in an early epic called the *Minyas*, apparently because Apollo was supporting the Pleuronians. It is not known how the war in general was described in either poem.⁸⁶ The lyric poet Bacchylides (fifth century BC) writes similarly that Artemis, whose anger was not yet allayed, provoked a war with the Couretes over the tawny hide of the boar, and that Meleager aroused the anger of his mother by killing two of her brothers, Iphiclos and Aphares. In this account Althaia does not curse him, however, but proceeds to kill him by burning the log as in the later tradition.⁸⁷ It should not necessarily be assumed that Homer was unacquainted with the story of the log simply because he omits it from his account. Folk-tale motifs of this kind, some surely of great antiquity, appear with special frequency in the mythology of the Deucalionids, and it is quite possible that this one was already familiar by Homer's time, but was ignored by him because the curse fitted his narrative purpose better or seemed better suited to high epic. The early Attic tragedian Phrynichos is the first author who is definitely known to have written about the log.⁸⁸

In recounting a largely Homeric version of this myth as an alternative after having begun with the standard later version, Apollodorus records a detail that may well have come from early epic, that the sons of Thestios laid claim to the boar's hide on the ground that one of them, namely Iphiclos (who is mentioned by Bacchylides as we have seen), had been the first to hit the boar. In stating here that Meleager was killed in battle, after having killed the other sons of Thestios when he returned to the fray, Apollodorus was surely following the early epic tradition.⁸⁹ Although Homer never states explicitly that Meleager was killed in this way, his audience would probably have assumed this to be the case without need for any explicit statement; and in view of the context in which the story is told, it is understandable that the poet should have been vague about the matter, since it is recounted by Achilles' tutor Phoinix as a paradigm while he is trying to persuade Achilles to return to the fighting at Troy. It may be felt in any case that Meleager's fate is indicated clearly enough in the way in which Althaia's curse is described, for after telling how she beat the earth with her hands, calling on Hades and Persephone to cause his death, the poet states ominously that 'the Erinys who walks in darkness and has no pity in her heart heard her from Erebos'.⁹⁰

As is already stated in the *Iliad*, Meleager married Cleopatra, the daughter of Idas and Marpessa,⁹¹ who was herself of Aetolian descent as a granddaughter of Thestios'

brother Euenos. For the circumstances in which the Messenian hero Idas abducted her mother Marpessa from Aetolia, see p. 147. No children are reported for the short-lived marriage (except perhaps in the *Cypria*, which stated that Protesilaos, the first Greek warrior to die at Troy, was married to a presumably legitimate daughter of Meleager called Polydora, rather than to Laodmaeia as in the subsequent tradition, see p. 466⁹²). Since Meleager was supposed to have fallen in love with Atalanta in some accounts at least, it was sometimes suggested that she bore a son to him, namely Parthenopaios, one of the Seven against Thebes⁹³ (see p. 355; there were conflicting traditions about his parentage).

The later life of Oineus, and his successors at Calydon

After losing his wife Althaia in the tragic circumstances described above, Oineus married Periboia, daughter of Hipponoos, who was descended from the old Inachid ruling family of Argos. She was born outside the Argolid, however, because her father was king of Olenos in Achaea, the northern coastal province of the Peloponnese. All manner of tales were recounted to explain how she came to be the wife of Oineus on the mainland. According to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, her father discovered that she had been seduced by Hippostratos, son of Amarynceus, a member of the royal family of neighbouring Elis, and so sent her away to Oineus to be put to death (evidently because he lived at a suitably remote distance), but Oineus, who was a kind-hearted man in any case, chose to marry her instead.⁹⁴ Or, her father discovered that she had been seduced by Oineus himself, and sent her away with him after learning that she was pregnant.⁹⁵ Or according to a quite different account from the *Thebais*, a lost poem in the epic cycle, in which Oineus seems to have been represented as being more warlike than in the later tradition, Oineus won her as a prize of war after attacking her father's city.⁹⁶ Whatever the circumstances of her marriage to him, she bore him a son who was of the same heroic stature as Meleager, if of less noble character, namely TYDEUS, who is famous in myth for having been one of the Seven against Thebes.⁹⁷ A curious alternative tradition is recorded in which Oineus is said to have fathered him by a daughter of his, Gorge, after Zeus, for some unstated reason, had inspired him with an incestuous passion for her.⁹⁸

Although Tydeus grew up to become a great hero, he passed his adult life outside Aetolia and performed his deeds elsewhere, as did his even greater son, Diomedes, for he had to depart into exile after killing one or more of his blood-relations. He was usually said to have killed some members of his family because they were conspiring against his father, either his maternal uncles, the sons of Porthaon, according to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, or else some cousins of his, the sons of Melas or Agrios. Or, he accidentally killed a brother of his, generally named as Olenias or Melanippos.⁹⁹ Tydeus was granted refuge by Adrastus, king of Argos, who offered his daughter Deipyle to him as a wife and promised to restore him to his original homeland (see p. 353 for the circumstances), but he was killed at Thebes before that promise could be put into effect (see p. 356). Although a fine warrior, he had a reputation for being brutally violent beyond the bounds of civilized behaviour, as is

shown most starkly in the tale of his death. He left a single son, Diomedes, who was one of the greatest heroes of his age. When Adrastus died without an heir, Diomedes inherited his kingdom in the Argolid, and so became one of the most powerful of all the Greek rulers, and he went on to play a prominent part in the Trojan War as the leader of the men of his land, see p. 368. This second family of Oineus was thus of the highest importance in heroic legend, but as belonging to Argive rather than to Aetolian legend.

When Oineus grew too old to retain proper control of his kingdom, some nephews of his, the sons of Agrios, revolted against him to place their father on the throne; and they not only robbed him of his kingdom but also imprisoned him and cruelly mistreated him. His grandson Diomedes came to his rescue, however, entering Aetolia in secret with his friend Alcmaion (a great Argive hero who became the leader of the Epigonoι, see p. 361), and killed all the sons of Thestios apart from two alone, Thersites and Onchestos, who had fled beforehand to the Peloponnese. Realizing that Oineus was no longer capable of ruling in any safety, Diomedes took him away to the Peloponnese, transferring the kingdom to Andraimon, a son-in-law of Oineus.¹⁰⁰ In one version of the story, Oineus arrived safely in Argos, where he was tended by Diomedes until he died; or else he was murdered on the way by the two surviving sons of Agrios, who ambushed him in Arcadia at a place known as the Hearth of Telephos. For the subsequent career of Thersites, which was equally disreputable, see pp. 475–6; nothing further is recorded of his brother Onchestos. As for Oineus, he was buried in the western Argolid whatever the circumstances of his death, at the city of Oinoe, hence its name.¹⁰¹ In another account of these events, Diomedes expelled Agrios (or killed him and his sons) after the Trojan War with the aid of Sthenelos, son of Capaneus, and restored Oineus to the throne;¹⁰² but that is implausible in terms of any rational chronology. Oineus was proverbial for the misfortunes of his old age.¹⁰³

Nothing is recorded of the birth and origin of ANDRAIMON, who succeeded to the Calydonian throne because he was married to Oineus' daughter Gorge. He was said to have founded Amphissa, the main city of Western Locris, and his supposed grave, which he shared with his wife, could be seen there in historical times.¹⁰⁴ The Amphissians apparently claimed to be of Aetolian stock. THOAS, the son and successor of Andraimon, appears in the *Iliad* as the leader of the Aetolian contingent at Troy;¹⁰⁵ although mentioned occasionally in the epic as a respected chieftain, he does not stand out as a hero of individual character or achievement. According to the *Little Iliad*, an early epic in the Trojan cycle, he inflicted wounds on Odysseus to make him unrecognizable when he made his secret incursion into Troy towards the end of the war (see p. 480); and he is listed among the warriors who hid in the Wooden Horse.¹⁰⁶ He probably resumed power in Calydon after the war in the early tradition, although he was sometimes said to have settled abroad in Italy.¹⁰⁷ According to the local tradition at Amphissa, the bronze temple-statue of Athena in her sanctuary on the acropolis had been brought back from Troy by Thoas as part of the spoils of the war.¹⁰⁸ Apollodorus records a curious tale in which Odysseus is said to have taken refuge with Thoas after being exiled from his homeland for killing Penelope's suitors, and to have married an unnamed daughter of the king, who bore

him a son called Leontophonos.¹⁰⁹ Haimon, the son and successor of Thoas, was the father of Oxylos,¹¹⁰ who acted as guide to the Heraclids during their final invasion of the Peloponnese (see p. 280). As a reward for his services, Oxylos asked to be granted the throne of Elis, which had been ruled by his ancestors many generations earlier before Aitolos had gone away to Aetolia.

Notes

¹ Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 560, Acus. 2F34.

² Apollod. 1.7.2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pi. *Ol.* 9.41–56.

⁵ Hes. fr. 234 (from Str. 7.7.2); the stone-throwing is also mentioned in Acus. 2F35.

⁶ Hellanic. 4F6 (king of Thessaly), Apollod. 1.7.2 (king of Phthia), Conon 27 (Phthiotis).

⁷ Hellanic. 4F117.

⁸ Marmor Parium 239A4 Jac., Paus. 1.18.8 (burial).

⁹ Apollod. 1.7.2, schol. Stat. *Theb.* 3.560, Apollod. 3.8.2 respectively.

¹⁰ Ov. *Met.* 1.163–415. See also Horace *Ode* 1.25–12, Manil. 4.831–3, Lucan 5.75–6, Hyg. *Fab.* 152 for universal flood, and Prob. *Georg.* 1.60–3, schol. Hor. *Ode* 1.2.9 for oracle.

¹¹ Hes. fr. 5–7.

¹² Pher. 3F23 (Protogeneia first attested as daughter); Amphictyon, Hdt. 7.200, Paus. 10.8.1–2 (this Amphictyon should properly be distinguished from the Athenian king of that name, although the two were sometimes identified, e.g. Apollod. 1.7.2).

¹³ Hom. *Il.* 2.681–5.

¹⁴ Ibid. 2.530.

¹⁵ Hes. fr. 5.

¹⁶ Apollod. 1.7.3, cf. Hes. fr. 9, 10a.20–3.

¹⁷ Death of sons of Aigimios, Apollod. 2.8.3.

¹⁸ Str. 8.7.1 (Hellen sends younger sons abroad), Paus. 7.1.2 (Xouthos driven out by brothers on accusation of stealing); marriage of X. and children, Hes. fr. 10a.20–4, Eur. *Ion* 57–64, 294–8 (Creousa assigned to him for help in Euboean war), Conon 27, Apollod. 1.7.3, etc.

¹⁹ Hes. fr. 10a.20–4.

²⁰ Str. 8.7.1 and Conon 27 respectively.

²¹ Paus. 7.1.2 and 1.31.2.

²² Hdt. 5.65.

²³ Eur. *Ion* 1–56.

²⁴ Ibid. 57–66.

²⁵ Ibid. 510–65.

²⁶ Ibid. 988–1208 (Creousa's plot and its failure).

²⁷ Ibid. 1208–1622.

²⁸ Ibid. 1574–94.

²⁹ Paus. 7.1.2.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Paus. 7.1.3–4.

³² Apollod. 1.7.3.

³³ Apollod. 1.7.3, cf. Hes. fr. 10a.99–101; Apollod. 3.13.1, cf. Pher. 3F1b.

³⁴ Apollod. 1.7.4.

³⁵ Ibid. 1.7.3, cf. Hes. fr. 10a.34–5.

³⁶ Apollod. 1.7.4, cf. Hes. fr. 15, 16, schol. *Il.* 9.562.

³⁷ Prob. *Georg.* 1.399 citing Nicander, cf. Ov. *Met.* 11.410–750 (Alcyone here described as a daughter of Aiolos, ruler of the winds), Hyg. *Fab.* 65.

³⁸ Schol. *Il.* 9.562, Ovid l.c.

³⁹ Apollod. 1.7.3, cf. Hes. fr. 10a.99–101.

⁴⁰ Apollod. 3.13.1, cf. Pher. 3F1b.

⁴¹ Apollod. 1.7.4.

- 42 Ibid. 1.7.3, cf. Hes. fr. 10a.34–5.
43 Hes. fr. 10a.58–62 (parentage of Endymion), Paus. 5.1.3 (Aethlios first king of Elis, his wife not named).
44 Apollod. 1.7.5.
45 Zenob. 3.76, cf. Apollod. 1.7.6.
46 Schol. A.R. 4.57.
47 Cic. *Tusc.* 1.92.
48 Both in schol. A.R. 4.57.
49 Sappho 199, A.R. 4.57–8, Lucian *D.D.* 19.
50 A.R. 4.57–8, Str. 14.1.8 (grave on Latmos), Paus. 6.20.9 (grave in Elis), Paus. 5.1.5 (conflicting traditions, story of his move).
51 Paus. 5.1.4.
52 Paus. 5.1.4–8; Apollod. 1.7.6 (that he killed Jason).
53 Apollod. 1.7.6.
54 Hes. fr. 22 (courted by many), Apollod. 1.7.7 (children by Ares).
55 Apollod. 1.8.1–2, Hes. fr. 25.10–19.
56 Apollod. 1.8.1.
57 E.g. Plut. *Moralia* 312a, Apollod. 1.8.2.
58 Bacch. 5.115–20.
59 Apollod. 1.8.1.
60 Hyg. *Fab.* 129.
61 Serv. *Georg.* 1.9, cf. Vat. Myth. 1.87 (herdsman here called Ovista).
62 Hom. *Il.* 6.216–21.
63 Bacch. 5.140–4, Aesch. *Libation-Bearers* 602–12.
64 Hyg. *Fab.* 171.
65 Apollod. 1.8.2 (when seven days old), D.S. 4.34.6 (Moirai appear in a dream), Ov. *Met.* 8.541ff; earliest sources for fateful log, Phrynichos *Pleuroniai* cited Paus. 10.31.2.
66 A.R. 1.190–201, Apollod. 1.9.16.
67 Stes. 179, Simon. 564, Hyg. *Fab.* 273.
68 A.R. 1.196–7.
69 Hom. *Il.* 9.533–42, Apollod. 1.8.2, D.S. 4.34.2–3, Ov. *Met.* 8.271–99; Athen. 9.402a (boar white), Str. 8.6.22.
70 Hom. *Il.* 9.537.
71 Bacch. 5.97–110.
72 E.g. Apollod. 1.8.2; half of kingdom too in Vat. Myth. 2.144.
73 Hom. *Il.* 9.544–5.
74 Apollod. 1.8.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 173, Ov. *Met.* 8.299–317.
75 Apollod. 1.8.2, Ov. *Met.* 8.329–424, Bacch. 5.111–20; earliest source, Hom. *Il.* 9.538–46.
76 Bacch. 5.115–20 (Ancaios and Agelaos), Apollod. 1.8.2 (Hyleus and Ancaios), Ov. *Met.* 8.362–4 (Ainesimos); for death of Ancaios, see Ov. *Met.* 8.391–402, Paus. 8.45.2.
77 Stat. *Theb.* 2.469–73.
78 Apollod. 1.8.2, Ov. *Met.* 8.380–2 and 414–19.
79 Lyc. 491–3.
80 E.g. Ov. *Met.* 8.386–7, Hyg. *Fab.* 174.
81 E.g. Ov. *Heroides* 4.99–100, D.S. 4.34.4.
82 Apollod. 1.8.2–3, Ov. *Met.* 8.425–525, Hyg. *Fab.* 174.
83 Ant. Lib. 2 (following Nicander), Apollod. 1.8.3, Ov. *Met.* 8.533–46, Ael. *N.A.* 4.42, Hyg. *Fab.* 174.
84 E.g. D.S. 4.34.7, Apollod. 1.8.3.
85 Hom. *Il.* 9.529–98.
86 Ibid. 9.571–2.
87 Bacch. 5.122–39.
88 Cited in Paus. 10.31.2.
89 Apollod. 1.8.3.
90 Hom. *Il.* 9.571–2.
91 Ibid. 9.556.
92 *Cypria* fr. 18 Davies (from Paus. 4.2.7).
93 Hyg. *Fab.* 70, Vat. Myth. 1.174.
94 Hes. fr. 112 (from Apollod. 1.8.4), cf. D.S. 4.35.1, sends her to him after she claims to have become

pregnant by Ares.

95 Apollod. 1.8.4.

96 *Thebais* fr. 8 Davies (from Apollod. l.c.).

97 Apollod. 1.8.4–5.

98 Peisandros 16F1.

99 Hes. fr. 10a.55–57, Pher. 3F122; see also Apollod. l.c., Hyg. *Fab.* 69, schol. Stat. *Theb.* 2.113, etc.

100 Apollod. 1.8.6.

101 Ibid. (killed on way), Paus. 2.25.2.

102 Hyg. *Fab.* 175, cf. Ant. Lib. 37 (Sthenelos not mentioned).

103 Athen. 6.223d.

104 Paus. 10.38.3.

105 Hom. *Il.* 2.638–44.

106 *Little Iliad* fr. 8 Davies; Verg. *Aen.* 2.262.

107 E.g. Lyc. 1013ff.

108 Paus. 10.38.3.

109 Apollod. *Epit.* 7.40.

110 Paus. 5.3.6.

18

Jason and the Argonauts

The myth of the Argonauts told how Jason, son of Aison, sailed from Iolcos in Thessaly with a crew of fifty heroes at the order of his uncle Pelias, the king of Iolcos, to fetch a golden fleece from Colchis at the far end of the Black Sea. Although the early epic accounts of the expedition have been lost, as in the case of the Theban Wars and Calydonian boar-hunt, we know far more about this adventure than we do about the other two, largely because an Argonautic epic has survived from the Hellenistic era along with invaluable scholia (ancient explanatory notes), which provide a large amount of information about the earlier tradition and Argonautic lore in general. We will use this poem, *The Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes, as our main guide in following the course of the expedition, while referring at the same time to what is known of the earlier tradition.

Before passing on to the expedition itself, we must consider the origin and nature of the object of Jason's quest, and the motives that Pelias may have had for sending him on his dangerous mission, in relation to the previous history of Iolcos and of its ruling family. After arriving in Colchis, Jason had to rely on the help of the king's daughter, Medeia, to be able to escape with the golden fleece, and she accompanied him back to Greece and became his wife; in the final part of the chapter, we will follow the subsequent life of Jason and Medeia in Greece until its tragic conclusion.

The golden fleece and why Jason was sent to fetch it

The origin of the golden fleece

The golden fleece had come from a wondrous ram that had carried a young Boeotian prince, PHRIXOS, to safety in Colchis after his stepmother had plotted to cause his death. His father ATHAMAS, whom we have already encountered as a foster-parent of the infant Dionysos (see p. 164), was a Boeotian king who was famed for his tangled marital affairs. He was of Deucalionid descent as one of the seven sons of Aiolos (see p. 379) and was sometimes said to have ruled at Orchomenos in north-western Boeotia (see p. 392) or even at Thebes (although there is no proper place for him in the succession). According to the standard tradition, he first married **Nephele** (Cloud, apparently a minor goddess), who bore him two children, **Phrixos** and

Helle; but he later put her aside to marry **Ino**, daughter of Cadmos, who bore him two further children, **Learchos** and **Melicertes**.

As is the manner of stepmothers in folklore, INO resented the children whom her husband had fathered by his previous wife, and indeed she hated them so greatly that she set out to contrive their death, or at least the death of the male child. Although there are quite frequent references to the story in earlier sources, we have to turn to mythographers from the Roman period for a full and coherent narrative. To start with Apollodorus' account, Ino persuaded the women of the land to parch the coming year's seed-grain (i.e. roast it over a fire) in secret from the men, and when the grain failed to germinate as a result of this treatment, Athamas sent envoys to Delphi, as Ino would doubtless have anticipated, to ask how the land could be delivered from its infertility. Ino then bribed the envoys to report that the oracle had declared that the famine would come to an end if Phrixos were sacrificed to Zeus, and although Athamas was reluctant to order the death of his son, his people insisted that he should be brought to the altar. NEPHELE intervened, however, by snatching Phrixos away along with his sister Helle and placing them on a golden-fleeced ram that she had obtained from Hermes, a wondrous beast that flew off through the sky to carry them away to safety.¹ In some accounts, the oracle is said to have ordered that Helle too should be brought to sacrifice, but she was always said to have been carried away with her brother irrespective of whether that was the case. The course of events that led up to their departure could vary considerably in different versions, depending on how the marital affairs of Athamas were described; two other versions will be narrated in that connection in the following section, but we will concentrate for the present on the story of the fleece.

The ram soared up into the air with the two children on its back and headed eastwards; but as it was crossing over from Europe to Asia Minor, flying above the narrow strait that separates the two, Helle lost her grip and slipped into the waters below, which thus came to be known as the Hellespont (Sea of Helle) from that time onwards.² Some said that she was rescued by Poseidon and bore a son to him afterwards, variously named as Edonos (the eponym of the Edones of Thrace), or Paion (the eponym of Paionia in northern Macedonia), or Almops (the eponym of another region in Macedonia).³ The ram continued on its way, now with Phrixos alone, and passed ever further to the east until it finally alighted in the land of Colchis, at the eastern end of the Black Sea. Although rationalized versions of the legend inevitably came to be developed, in which Phrixos was said to have been carried to safety in a ship that had a ram as its figurehead, or by a man called Crios (Ram), these are doubly inept because the main point of the story is lost.⁴

In gratitude for his deliverance, Phrixos sacrificed the ram to Zeus Phyxios (God of Escape), and then presented its golden fleece to the local ruler, AIETES. According to Apollonius, Phrixos sacrificed it in that way at the bidding of Hermes, and the king dedicated its fleece to the war-god Ares, suspending it on an oak tree in the grove of Ares near his city of Aia, where it was guarded by a dragon that never slept.⁵ Or, in other accounts, Phrixos hung it up in the temple of Ares in the city,⁶ or it was kept in the palace of Aietes,⁷ or deposited on the island of Aia in the river Phasis.⁸ As for the ram itself, it flew up to the heavens, or was transferred there by

Nephele, to become the constellation of the Ram (Aries); it could be explained that this constellation is extremely faint because the ram had been deprived of its gleaming coat.

Aietes was a son of Helios (the Sun) by an Oceanid nymph named Perseis (or Perse), as is already mentioned in the *Iliad*.⁹ He was a brother of the enchantress Circe, and his daughter Mediea, who plays a central role in the myth of the Argonauts, was gifted likewise with magical powers. His kingdom would originally have been imagined as lying within a purely mythical realm, in the same way as Circe's island. In connection with the Argonauts, he is generally represented as being a cold-hearted despot who has a suspicious mind and is utterly ruthless. In the early tradition, however, he seems to have offered a quite friendly reception to Phrixos, presumably won round by the gift of the fleece, welcoming him to his court and offering him his daughter Chalciope (or Iophossa) as a wife. She bore him four sons, Argos, Melas, Phrontis, and Cytisoros,¹⁰ and he apparently lived in Colchis without further incident until he died of old age.¹¹ Apollonius holds to this account in his Hellenistic epic, although he indicates that Aietes granted this friendly reception to Phrixos only because Hermes came to warn him that it was the will of Zeus.¹² There were other versions, however, quite possibly derived from Attic tragedy, in which Aietes finally killed Phrixos, after having received prophetic warning that he should fear death at the hand of a foreigner descended from Aiolos.¹³

In the poem of Apollonius, as we will see, the sons of Phrixos set off for Greece when they came of age in the hope of recovering their grandfather's inheritance, but were shipwrecked on an island in the Black Sea, where they remained until Jason picked them up and brought them back to Colchis.¹⁴ Since Aietes had been warned by his divine father to beware of treachery from within his own family, he was highly suspicious when he saw them arriving in the company of strangers, and this was one of the reasons why he bore such malice against the Argonauts.¹⁵

Alternative accounts of the marital affairs of Athamas, and his subsequent life

To return briefly to Athamas and the tales that were told about his marriages and children, he was supposed to have lost the children of his second marriage too in tragic circumstances. In one account this came about as a direct result of the preceding events, for when he discovered that his second wife Ino had plotted the death of the children of his first marriage, he was so angry that he killed LEARCHOS, the elder of the two sons whom Ino had borne to him, and set off in pursuit of Ino herself, causing her to jump into the sea in terror with her infant son MELICERTES in her arms.¹⁶ According to a more highly favoured account, however, Hera caused the death of the two children by sending Ino and Athamas mad to punish them for having reared Dionysos, an illegitimate child of Zeus (see p. 164). In his frenzy, Athamas hunted Learchos down and shot him in the belief that he was a deer, while Ino threw Melicertes into a cauldron of boiling water and then jumped into the sea with him.¹⁷ Or, in Ovid's version, Athamas tracked down Ino and her two children in the deluded belief that she was a lioness with two cubs, and snatched Learchos

from her arms and hurled him through the air, causing him to smash his head against a rock. Now utterly distraught, Ino rushed away with Melicertes in her arms, howling like a wild beast, and hurled herself into the sea.¹⁸ Dionysos (or in Ovid's account, Aphrodite) took pity on Ino and turned her into a minor sea-goddess, Leucothea (the White Goddess), whom we will encounter again as the rescuer of Odysseus (see p. 510). Melicertes was also deified, under the name of Palaimon.¹⁹

After these events, Athamas was banished from his kingdom and set off to seek a new home. When he consulted the oracle at Delphi, he was advised to settle at a place where he was offered hospitality by wild animals. As he was passing through Thessaly after lengthy wanderings, he came across some wolves that were sharing the remains of a dead sheep; and when they fled at the sight of him, leaving their food behind, he recognized that the oracle had been fulfilled. So he made his home in that region, which was known as the Athamantian Plain from that time onwards. He now married yet again, taking THEMISTO, a daughter of the Thessalian hero Hypseus, as his third wife. Of the four sons of this marriage, only Schoineus is worthy of mention, as the father of Atalanta in the Boeotian tradition (see p. 551).²⁰

In some sources Athamas is presented as having married Themisto while he was still in Boeotia, as is indeed the case with our earliest source for her, the mythographer Pherecydes. In his account of the marital affairs of Athamas, she seems to have taken the place of Ino as the wicked stepmother who plotted the death of Nephele's children by spoiling the harvest.²¹ Themisto also appears in a distinctive revenge story of her own, however, probably invented by Euripides on the model of the Athenian myth of Aedon (see p. 341). For, according to a tale recounted by Hyginus, which he ascribes to Euripides, Athamas married Ino as his first wife, fathering Learchos and Melicertes by her as usual, but married Themisto when he came to think that Ino must have died, evidently after she had disappeared in mysterious circumstances. He later discovered, however, that Ino had simply gone away to take part in Bacchic revels on Mt Parnassos, and he brought her back into his home under a concealed identity, pretending to Themisto that she was merely a maidservant. Having borne sons of her own to Athamas, Themisto wanted to kill Ino's children, and confided her plans to the supposed maidservant, telling her to dress Ino's children in black and her own in white to ensure that there would be no mistake. But Ino dressed Themisto's children in black and so caused them to die at their mother's hand, and Themisto committed suicide when she discovered what she had done.²²

Hyginus also records a combined account in which Athamas first married Nephele, and then Themisto, and finally Ino. By piecing together material from three separate chapters of his book, the following narrative can be constructed. After being put aside in favour of Ino, Themisto hid in the palace with the intention of killing Ino's children, but she accidentally killed her own children instead because the nurse had dressed them in the wrong clothing, and so she took her own life. Ino in turn wanted to kill Nephele's children, to ensure that her own sons alone would survive, and parched the seed-grain as in the usual story. At her instigation, the messenger who had been sent to Delphi reported that the oracle had ordered that Phrixos should be sacrificed, and when the king refused to order the death of his son, Phrixos

volunteered to die so as to deliver the land from its distress. On seeing him brought to the altar, however, the messenger felt pity for him and betrayed Ino's plot to the king at the last moment. Athamas then ordered that Ino should be put to death along with her son Melicertes; but Dionysos, who owed a debt to Ino for having nursed him during his infancy, saved her by casting a mist around her. He sent Phrixos and Helle mad, furthermore, but while they were wandering through a forest thereafter in a state of distraction, Nephele came to them with the golden ram and they escaped on it in the usual way.²³

In yet another account, recorded by the Hellenistic mythographer Philostephanos and probably also derived from tragedy, Athamas married Ino first of all, but later put her aside at the order of Hera to marry Nephele. He continued to see Ino in secret, however, and when Nephele eventually learned of this and abandoned him, Ino recovered her position, and then proceeded to plot the death of Nephele's children as in the usual story.²⁴ These various examples show how a legend could be developed into any number of different forms as authors adapted it for their own purposes.

The family of Cretheus at Iolcos, and the origin of his successor Pelias

Phrixos' adventure with the flying ram provided the Argonauts with a suitable object for their quest, the golden fleece that came to be deposited as a consequence in the remote land of Colchis at the far end of the Black Sea. To understand why Pelias, king of Iolcos, should have asked his nephew Jason to undertake the perilous task leading an expedition to fetch it, it is necessary to consider the previous history of Iolcos and of its ruling family, which belonged once again to the great Deucalionid family (see p. 379). This city of Iolcos, which lay near the coast at the head of the Gulf of Pagasai in southern Thessaly, was founded by **Cretheus**, a son of Aiolos who lived in Thessaly, the region of his birth. Cretheus married his niece **Tyro**, who was entrusted to him after her father **Salmoneus**, a son of Aiolos who had left Thessaly to found a city in the Peloponnese, met an early death as a result of his impious behaviour. Tyro bore three sons to Cretheus, including **Aison**, the father of Jason; but although, as the eldest son, Aison might have expected to have inherited from his father in normal circumstances, Tyro happened to have borne two sons to the great god Poseidon before her marriage, and one of these, **Pelias**, became king instead after the death of Cretheus, excluding Aison and his son **Jason** from the succession. Jason lived near Iolcos under the rule of Pelias until the king, for reasons that are variously explained, sent him to fetch the golden fleece in the hope and expectation that he would die in the attempt.

We must begin by considering how TYRO came to be entrusted to Cretheus and attracted the attention of Poseidon. Her father SALMONEUS, son of Aiolos, had settled in Elis in the north-west corner of the Peloponnese, where he had founded a city beside the river Alpheios, naming it Salmone after himself. He married Alcidence, daughter of Aleos, and Tyro is the only child recorded for the marriage.²⁵ By usurping the prerogatives of Zeus, however, he soon provoked his doom and the destruction of his people and city. For not only did he call himself Zeus and demand

to receive the sacrifices that had previously been offered to that god, but he also imitated Zeus's thunder by dragging bronze kettles and animal hides behind his chariot, and imitated his lightning by hurling blazing torches up into the sky. Zeus punished him for his presumption by striking him with a genuine thunderbolt, and proceeded to destroy his entire city along with its inhabitants (presumably because they had acceded to the will of their king by honouring him as Zeus).²⁶ It has long been suspected that this legend contains a recollection of weather-magic, in which the actions that are ascribed in the myth to hubris and overweening arrogance would have been performed to induce rain through sympathetic magic.

The young Tyro alone survived the destruction, being spared by Zeus because she had constantly rebuked her father for putting himself on a level with the gods.²⁷ Zeus then entrusted her to her uncle Cretheus, who brought her up in Thessaly.²⁸ This ancient myth can be followed to this point in fragments from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, and Tyro's encounter with Poseidon in Thessaly is described in an even earlier source, the *Odyssey*. She conceived a passion, so we are told, for a local river-god, Enipeus, and haunted his beautiful waters and kept telling him of her love, but a much greater god, Poseidon, took advantage of the situation to take her for himself. For he assumed the guise of Enipeus to make love with her by the mouth of the river, causing a large wave to arch over them to conceal them from sight, and she became pregnant as a consequence with twin sons, PELIAS and NELEUS.²⁹

According to this account in the *Odyssey*, Poseidon identified himself to Tyro afterwards and told her that she should rear the glorious children whom she would bear,³⁰ but in the subsequent tradition she was always said to have exposed them at birth. They were rescued by some horse-breeders, who gave Pelias his name, so it came to be claimed, because one of their horses kicked Pelias in the face leaving a black-and-blue (*pelion*) mark.³¹ Some said that the twins were suckled by two different animals until they were discovered, Pelias by a mare and Neleus by a bitch.³² Sophocles seems to have offered an unusual version of this story in his lost *Tyro*, in which the twins were set afloat in the river in a container of some kind (*skaphē*),³³ much like Romulus and Remus at Rome (see p. 535).

When the twins grew up, they rediscovered their mother and rescued her from her stepmother Sidero (Iron-woman), who had been cruelly mistreating her in the meantime. Although Sidero is sometimes described as the second wife of Tyro's father Salmoneus,³⁴ it would make more sense to assume that she was the first wife of Cretheus, during the period while he was still acting as guardian to Tyro before taking her as his wife. Pelias killed Sidero in any case, in circumstances that would have a bearing on the story of the Argonauts; for he slaughtered her at an altar of Hera after she had taken sanctuary there, and compounded the fault by ceasing to honour Hera thereafter.³⁵ Hera hated him as a consequence and did her best to help Jason and the Argonauts; and in one early version of the story, as we will see, she even contrived that Pelias should send Jason on his mission in the first place because she knew that this would ultimately cause the destruction of Pelias himself.

CRETHEUS married Tyro when she came of age, and she bore him three sons, Aison, Pheres, and Amythaon.³⁶ As for the children whom she had previously borne to Poseidon, twins tend to be the best of friends or worst of enemies in myth, and in

the case of Pelias and Neleus, they quarrelled bitterly when they grew up. Pelias finally drove his brother into exile, causing him to seek refuge in Messenia in the south-east corner of the Peloponnese, where he founded the Neleid dynasty, which included Nestor among its members (see further on p. 451).³⁷ Pelias for his part came to reside at Iolcos, where he seems to have enjoyed an honoured position as stepson of the founder. He succeeded to the throne in any case after the death of Cretheus, even though the king had fathered the afore-mentioned sons of his own by Tyro. The fact that Pelias came to rule the city instead of Aison, the eldest son of Cretheus, need not necessarily imply that he seized the throne illegitimately, for sons who are borne to gods by the wives of kings in legend can be regarded as legitimate heirs of those kings; and in one early version of Pelias' legend at least, Aison and Jason laid no claim to his throne and Hera contrived that Pelias should send Jason to fetch the fleece for reasons of her own.

In considering the origin of Jason's quest, we are primarily concerned with his branch of Cretheus' family, but something should be said in parentheses about the two younger sons of Cretheus and their descendants. **Pheres**, the second son of Cretheus, founded the Thessalian city of Pherai, which lay to the west of Iolcos; and he married Periclymene, daughter of Minyas, who bore him two sons, Admetos and Lycourgos. **Admetos** succeeded to his father's kingdom, which was famous for its large flocks of sheep, and married **Alcestis**, the daughter of Pelias.³⁸ He and his wife appear in two very notable myths. One told how Apollo had to work for him as a serf for a year, and helped him to win Alcestis as his wife, see p. 145; and the other told how Alcestis later came to be rescued from death by Heracles after volunteering to die on her husband's behalf, see p. 146. Their son **Eumelos** ('Rich in flocks') commanded the men from Pherai, Iolcos, and the neighbouring towns at Troy. His magnificent horses, which had been bred by Apollo, were second only to the divine horses of Achilles for their speed.³⁹ **Lycourgos**, the younger son of Pheres, became king of Nemea in the Argolid, where his tomb could be seen in historical times,⁴⁰ and was best remembered as the father of the short-lived Opheltis (see p. 355). In contrast to his brothers Aison and Pheres, who both stayed in Thessaly, **Amythaon**, the youngest son of Cretheus, went away to live with his half-brother Neleus in Messenia, where he founded an important family of Argive seers and rulers through his sons **Bias** and **Melampous**, see pp. 222ff.

Why Pelias sent his nephew Jason to fetch the golden fleece

We now come to the crucial point in the story, that in which Pelias sent his nephew Jason away to fetch the fleece. In considering the reasons why he was said to have done so, we will start with an early version in which he sent him at the instigation of Hera, which is recorded in a fragment from Pherecydes and a corresponding narrative by Apollodorus (which seems to be based on that of Pherecydes). While Pelias was reigning at Iolcos as Cretheus' successor, Jason preferred to live in the country outside the city, so we are told, because he had a passion for agriculture. There is no reason to suppose that he stayed away from the city because he had any fear for his safety, as in the other main version that will be considered shortly. When

he came to Iolcos to have his fateful meeting with Pelias, it was in response to a general summons issued by the king rather than because he wanted to take any action against him. For when Pelias was once intending to offer a sacrifice to Poseidon by the seashore, he summoned all the citizens to attend, including Jason, who received the message while he was ploughing his fields beside the river Anauros. He took off his sandals to cross the river but forgot to put his left sandal on again when he arrived at the opposite bank (or else lost it in the current). Now Pelias had once received an oracle warning him to beware of the man with a single sandal; and when he saw Jason arrive at the ceremony with one foot bare, he called the prophecy to mind and was thoroughly alarmed. So he invited Jason to the palace on the following day and asked him what he would do if he had been told by an oracle that he would be murdered by one of his fellow-citizens. At the inspiration of Hera, who had long hated Pelias for reasons already explained, Jason immediately replied that he would send him to fetch the golden fleece; for the goddess put this thought into Jason's mind because she knew that if he were sent on that mission, he would return with the Colchian enchantress Medeia, who would cause the death of Pelias (see p. 411). Pelias assumed, however, that such a quest would bring death to anyone who attempted it, and he sent Jason on his way without hesitation.⁴¹

In the most familiar form of the legend, Pelias was a brutal tyrant who first robbed Aison of his rightful throne and later tried to cause the death of Jason when he arrived to reclaim it; we will follow the earliest surviving account in Pindar's fourth Pythian Ode. To ensure that the new-born Jason would be safe from Pelias, his parents pretended that he had died at birth and sent him away in secret at night while making a show of lamentation, wrapping the infant in purple robes as befitted a royal prince. They entrusted him to the care of the Centaur Cheiron, who lived in a cave on Mt Pelion to the east. We should doubtless assume that Jason was reared by Cheiron in the preceding version too. Jason remained in hiding in the country, unknown to Pelias or anyone outside his family circle, until he was twenty years old, when he returned to Iolcos to demand the throne from Pelias. Now Pelias had received two oracles, one telling him that death would come to him from a descendant of Aiolos, and the other warning him to beware of the man who would come down from the mountains wearing only a single sandal; so when Jason, who was a great-grandson of Aiolos, appeared in the city wearing a single sandal and demanded the throne, Pelias realized that he would have to contrive his removal and destruction. Pretending that he was willing to surrender the throne, he asked Jason to perform a special favour for him before taking over the kingdom; for Phrixos had appeared to him in a dream, so he claimed, to ask that the golden fleece should be fetched home to Greece, and this was a task that was better suited to a young man like Jason than an old man like himself. Jason readily agreed to undertake the mission on his behalf, giving him reason to suppose that he had rescued himself from the threatened danger. Jason's missing sandal is not explained by any accident in Pindar's narrative, and it would seem that Jason, who is presented as a martial figure, was deliberately wearing a sandal on one foot only in accordance with a practice that was sometimes followed by Greek warriors, to make it easier to gain a firm foot-hold on slippery ground.⁴²

Whether or not Pelias was regarded as a usurper, it was apparently agreed from an early period that he was a man of violent character. The poet Mimnermus (late seventh century BC) refers to the grievous task that was set for Jason by the brutal (*hybristēs*) Pelias, and the *Theogony* speaks in similar terms of the many grievous labours that were imposed on him by the exceedingly brutal and overbearing king.⁴³ It is suggested in some late sources that Aison did in fact succeed Cretheus as king of Iolcos, but died prematurely bequeathing the kingdom to Pelias on the understanding that he would rule as regent until Jason came of age; however, when Jason returned from the country as a young man, Pelias sent him off to fetch the fleece as usual to save himself from having to hand over the throne (or because an oracle had warned him to beware of the man with one sandal).⁴⁴ Apollonius says little about the origins of Jason's quest in his epic, merely stating that he came to attend Pelias' sacrifice, losing one of his sandals in the river Anauros on the way, and was sent off on his voyage because the king had been warned by an oracle to beware of the man with one sandal.⁴⁵ It is reported elsewhere in the poem that Hera had a special fondness for Jason as the result of an encounter by the Anauros; for she had once sat down by the river in the guise of an old woman to test human righteousness, and Jason had felt compassion for her as he was returning from a hunting trip and had carried her through the water on his shoulders.⁴⁶

The voyage of the Argonauts

Jason arranges for a ship to be built and summons his companions

Jason prepared for his mission by organizing the construction of the greatest ship that had ever been built, the *Argo*, and by summoning leading heroes from all parts of Greece to accompany him on the voyage. The 'Argo which is famous to all (*pasimelousa*)', as Homer already calls her,⁴⁷ was said to have been the first large seagoing ship (although the ship that carried the fifty Danaids to Argos, see p. 216, would in fact have been built at an earlier period of mythical history). She was usually pictured as a fifty-oared ship (*pentēkontoros*), hence the usual number of her crew, who were known as the Argonauts (*Argonautai*, i.e. sailors of the *Argo*). Using timber cut on Mt Pelion nearby,⁴⁸ Argos, son of Arestor (or of Polybos, or Phrixos) built the *Argo* at Pagasai, the port of Iolcos, under the guidance of Athena. As a finishing touch, the goddess fitted an oracular timber into her bow; taken from the sacred oak at the oracle of Zeus at Dodona, it was endowed with the power of speech (see p. 409).⁴⁹ Ancient authors explain that the ship was called the *Argo* because she was so swift (*argos*, doubtless the true origin of the name) or in honour of her builder Argos.⁵⁰

The myth of the Argonauts was extremely ancient and underwent many changes in the course of time. It seems likely that Jason would have been accompanied by a crew of Minyans (legendary inhabitants of his own region) in the earliest tradition, and that the voyage of the Argonauts would have taken them into a purely mythical realm at the eastern edges of the earth. As time progressed, however, and the Greeks

became better acquainted with the lands and seas to the east of them, the geography became less fanciful, and Colchis, a real land at the eastern end of the Black Sea, replaced the mythical land of Aia as the destination of Jason's quest; and in due course, the adventure was developed into a Panhellenic enterprise involving heroes from far beyond Jason's home in north-eastern Greece.

To recruit worthy companions to sail with him in the *Argo*, Jason sent messengers to every corner of Greece to summon fifty of the foremost heroes of the age. These would have been men who reached their maturity a generation or so before the Trojan War, and many were fathers of great warriors who fought at Troy. As is commonly the case with collaborative enterprises in legend, no two lists are in full agreement on the names of the participants; since the Argonauts generally acted as a collective body (in surviving accounts at least) and few were remembered for any individual exploits, plausible names from the appropriate era could be suggested almost at will by poets and mythographers. The earliest useful information is provided by Pindar, who identifies ten Argonauts in addition to Jason himself and the seer Mopsos, evidently choosing from those who had been fathered by gods, namely Heracles, the two Dioscuri, Zetes and Calais (the Boreads, the twin sons of Boreas, god of the north wind), Euphemos and Periclymenos (two sons of Poseidon from the Peloponnese), Orpheus, and two heroes of lesser note, Echion and Eurytos, who were twin sons of Hermes from Alope in Thessaly.⁵¹ Although fuller lists would surely have been provided in early epic, and are reported to have been provided in lost plays by Aeschylus and Sophocles, the earliest catalogue to survive is that offered at the beginning of Apollonius' Argonautic epic, which lists fifty-five Argonauts.⁵² The catalogues offered by subsequent authors seem to be largely derived from this with varying degrees of alteration, with the exception of that of Apollodorus, which was plainly of separate origin.⁵³ From among the heroes who are to be found in every catalogue and are not already named by Pindar, the following may be picked out as being most worthy of note: Admetos, Acastos, son of Pelias, the Arcadian Ancaios (see p. 548), the Samian Ancaios (see p. 568), Hylas (a favourite of Heracles, see below), Idas and Lynceus, the seer Idmon, Iphiclos, son of Phylacos, Cepheus, son of Aleos, Meleager, Menoitios, Polyphemos, son of Elatos, the helmsman Tiphys, and Telamon, the father of Ajax.

The outward voyage of the Argonauts

The Argonauts sailed to Colchis by way of the Hellespont and the southern shores of the Black Sea; accounts of their return journey were more varied. We will take Apollonius' Hellenistic epic as our guide for the outward journey, noting each successive landfall.⁵⁴

- (i) After setting off from Pagasai and rounding Cape Sepias, they stopped at Aphetai for two days before continuing on their way (an idea that arose because the name of the place might suggest in Greek that it is a starting-point). Heracles was sometimes said to have been left behind there (see below, p. 401).⁵⁵ (ii) They then skirted northern Thessaly and the Chalcidice before sailing east across the open sea to Lemnos, where they made their longest halt. There were no men on the island at the time because they had all been killed by the

women. For not long before, Aphrodite had afflicted the women with an evil smell to punish them for having neglected her cult, causing them to become so repulsive to their husbands that they had driven them from their beds and replaced them with captive women from Thrace; and the Lemnian women had been so enraged by this treatment that they had conspired together to murder every man on the island in a single night. One woman alone had broken the agreement, HYPsipyle, the daughter of the king and present queen of the island, who had saved her aged father Thoas by secretly sending him out to sea in a chest (or putting him on a ship, or hiding him away in the palace). On seeing the *Argo* approaching their shore, the women armed themselves and poured down to the beach, fearing that they were under attack from the Thracians; but the Argonauts sent their herald Aithalides to Hypsipyle to assure her that they had no hostile intentions. So she convened an assembly, and the women agreed to invite the Argonauts into their homes; for they realized that they would need male protectors or at least male children to guard them from attack and provide for them in their old age. Believing that the women were in difficulties because their menfolk had settled abroad in Thrace, the Argonauts were happy to oblige them and lived with them for a year, fathering many children. Jason stayed at the palace with Hypsipyle, who bore him two sons, Thoas (or Nebrophonos) and Euneos. As time progressed, however, and the Argonauts constantly postponed their departure from one day to another, Heracles, who had remained behind on the ship, finally lost patience and urged his comrades to continue on their way.⁵⁶

(iii) On the advice of Orpheus, they first rowed northwards to the island of Samothrace to be initiated into the mysteries of the gods of Samothrace (see p. 203), who protected sailors against the perils of the sea.⁵⁷ This is of course a comparatively late episode. (iv) After this detour, they entered the Straits of the Hellespont (Dardanelles) to make their way through to the Black Sea. They made their first landfall at Cyzicos on the Asian shore of the Propontis (Sea of Marmora), where they enjoyed the hospitality of CYZICOS, king of the Doliones. The next morning, as they were climbing a neighbouring mountain to survey their route, the *Argo* was attacked by the Gegeneis (Earth-born), a race of six-armed giants who lived on the mountain; but Heracles, who had stayed on the ship with some of the younger heroes, kept them at bay with his arrows, bringing many of them to the ground, until the rest of the crew returned to complete the slaughter. By a stroke of ill-fortune, the Argonauts were caught by adverse winds on the night after their departure and were driven back to their starting-point; and when they jumped ashore in the dark without realizing where they were, their former hosts mistook them for enemies from Euboea and engaged them in battle. Many of the Doliones perished in the fighting, including Cyzicos, who was killed unknowingly by Jason. In the light of dawn, however, both sides discovered their tragic and irremediable error, and joined together to mourn the death of the king.⁵⁸

(v) Further along the southern shore of the Propontis, the Argonauts called in at the land of the Mysians. While preparations were being made for a feast on that evening, Heracles wandered off into a forest to find some wood for a new oar, having broken his original oar by rowing it with excessive force. On seeing a pine tree that would suit the purpose, he knocked it with his club to free it from the ground and then pulled it up, roots and all. He had been accompanied on the expedition by a young favourite of his, HYLAS, son of Theiodamas or Ceux, who also wandered off on his own to fetch some water from a spring. He was destined never to return, because the nymph of the spring was so enchanted by his youthful beauty that she pulled him into the water to keep him for herself. Or, in Theocritus' account, he was seized by three such nymphs as he leant over the pool to fill his jar. His cries were heard by one Argonaut alone, Polyphemos, son of Elatos, a Thessalian Lapith, who warned Heracles that something had happened to his favourite; but although the two of them searched all night, they were unable to find any trace of him. Their comrades sailed off at dawn without realizing that anything was amiss, and they travelled some distance before discovering that the crew was incomplete. A fierce quarrel broke out as a consequence, but the recriminations were soon brought to a

halt by the appearance of the sea-god Glaucos (see p. 204), who rose up from the waves alongside the ship and announced that Heracles was fated to continue his labours and Polyphemos was fated to found the Mysian city of Cios, while Hylas had become the husband of the water-nymph who had seized him.⁵⁹

The legend of Hylas was rooted in local Mysian lore. As Apollonius mentions at the end of his account of the episode, the people of the area used to conduct a ritual search for him, supposedly in fulfilment of an oath that their ancestors had sworn to Heracles.⁶⁰ The people would roam through the mountains in a frenzy calling out for him at his festival each year, and sacrifices used to be offered to him at the spring that he was supposed to have visited, where the priest would call his name three times. It has been suggested that Hylas may have originated as a minor fertility god who disappeared and was then reborn with the vegetation each year. 'Shouting for Hylas' became a proverbial phrase for a futile enterprise.⁶¹

Heracles was a comparatively late addition to the crew of the *Argo*, and even when he was included in the muster, he was rarely said to have travelled the whole way, as is wholly understandable, since no exploits were recorded for him in connection with the winning of the fleece, and he would have tended to overshadow the traditional leader. If he was not left behind while searching for Hylas, it explained that he was put ashore at the very beginning because he was clumsy at rowing and broke the oars,⁶² or was left behind soon afterwards at Aphetai on the Thessalian coast, either by accident while he was fetching water, or because the oracular timber on the *Argo* announced that he was too heavy for the ship bear his weight.⁶³ Only in novelistic accounts from the Hellenistic era was it ever suggested that he sailed all the way to Colchis (or even became the leader of the expedition).⁶⁴

(vi) Before leaving the Propontis, the Argonauts called in at the land of the Bebrycians (Bebryces), who lived in the region of Chalcedon near the southern entrance to the Bosphoros. Their ruler AMYCOS, a son of Poseidon by the Bithynian nymph Melia, was a violent ruffian who forced passing strangers to box with him and killed them in the ring. On this occasion, however, the finest of all boxers, Pollux (one of the Dioscuri, see p. 448), was present to respond to the challenge and stepped forward with alacrity. So the two pugilists wrapped thongs of leather around their hands in accordance with ancient practice, and then exchanged punches until Pollux shattered the king's skull with a blow above the ear. The Bebrycians, who evidently had no sporting instincts, broke into the ring with their clubs and spears, but were routed by the Argonauts after a brisk fight.⁶⁵

(vii) As the Argonauts were making their way into the Bosphoros, a huge wave towered over their ship and threatened to overwhelm them, but they were steered to safety by their helmsman Tiphys and moored on the European shore of the strait. The surrounding area was ruled by the Thracian seer PHINEUS, who was not only blind but was in great misery because he was being persecuted by the Harpies. Apollonius explains his fate by saying that he had been granted prophetic powers by Apollo but had misused his gift to foretell the plans of Zeus to mortals in unerring detail, provoking that god to deprive him of his sight and send the Harpies against him. These loathsome creatures, here imagined as being like carrion-birds with women's heads, had brought him close to starvation, for they would swoop down to steal most of his food whenever he tried to eat, and would impart a revolting stench to the little that they left behind.⁶⁶ For their nature and origin, see p.52.

In the many conflicting accounts of the legend of Phineus, all kinds of explanations are offered for his blindness and (where relevant) his persecution by the Harpies. In two different accounts from the Hesiodic corpus, he was blinded 'because he revealed the route to Phrixos' (presumably the route to Colchis), or because, in unexplained circumstances, he chose long life at the expense of his sight.⁶⁷ In what may perhaps be a fuller account of the latter story, it is reported in a later source

that he chose to surrender his sight when offered a choice of two options by the gods, either to become a blind seer or else be healthy though short-lived without possessing such powers.⁶⁸ Or, according to another tradition, he was blinded by Poseidon for telling the sons of Phrixos how to find their way to Greece.⁶⁹

There was another group of myths in which Phineus incurred grave troubles for himself because, after remarrying, he mistreated the sons whom he had fathered by his first marriage. Sophocles wrote at least two plays on this matter, but little is known for sure about their content except that Phineus blinded his two children at the instigation of their stepmother.

The Hellenistic mythographer Asclepiades provides a full narrative in which Phineus first married Cleopatra, daughter of Boreas (as in Sophocles' *Phineus*), and then a certain Eurytie, who laid false accusations against the sons of his first marriage; so he handed them over to her to be killed, much to the anger of Zeus, who offered him the choice of either death or blindness. In choosing the latter alternative, he incautiously stated that he no longer wanted to see the sun, and so angered the sun-god Helios in turn, who sent the Harpies against him. But he was delivered from them by the Boreads after the arrival of the Argonauts, as in Apollonius' version recounted below.⁷⁰ Other accounts are recorded in which the second wife of Phineus, who is also named as Idaia or Eidothea, accused her stepsons of trying to rape or seduce her, and so prompted Phineus to blind or kill them, or to hand them over to her to be blinded and imprisoned or put to death; and the Argonauts were sometimes said to have punished him, or to have caused his death, after discovering that he had been mistreating his sons.⁷¹ But at this point it would probably be best to return to Apollonius' narrative before we get lost in this labyrinth.

When the Argonauts arrived in his land, Phineus told them that an oracle had revealed that Zetes and Calais, the twin sons of Boreas, who were brothers of his wife Cleopatra, would be able to deliver him from the Harpies; and once he had assured them that they would not incur the anger of the gods by doing so, the Boreads readily agreed to come to his aid.⁷² Or, according to Apollodorus, he asked to be helped in this regard as his price for advising the Argonauts about their route.⁷³ The Boreads lay in wait as soon as some food had been laid out as bait for the Harpies, and tried to attack them, swords in hand, when they swooped down; but the Harpies hastily devoured the food and took flight, speeding away over the sea with the Boreads in close pursuit. For, as might be expected as sons of a wind-god, the brothers were winged beings who could fly with great speed. They pursued the Harpies as far as the Strophades, some small islands to the west of the Peloponnese, where they would have killed them if Iris, goddess of the rainbow, the sister of the Harpies (see p. 51), had not appeared and ordered them to desist. Explaining that it was not lawful for them to attack the Harpies with their swords because they were agents of Zeus, she promised that the Harpies would never trouble Phineus again in the future, and they duly returned to their den in Crete.⁷⁴ Apollonius claims that the afore-mentioned islands had formerly been known as the Plotai or Floating Islands, but were now renamed the Strophadai or 'Islands of Turning' because the Boreads had turned back (*hupstrephon*) there.⁷⁵ According to a rather different version

recorded by Apollodorus, the Harpies were fated to die at the hands of the Boreads, whereas the Boreads for their part were fated to die if they ever failed to catch their prey; and since the Harpies died of exhaustion during the pursuit, one dropping into a Peloponnesian river and the other onto the Strophades (here wrongly identified with the Echinadian Islands), the pursuers died along with the pursued.⁷⁶ There are also versions in which the Boreads finally caught up with the Harpies and killed them.⁷⁷

Once the Harpies were dead or gone, Phineus provided the Argonauts with invaluable information about the future course of their voyage, advising them above all on how to survive the most immediate danger that awaited them, the Symplegades or Clashing Rocks. These were two huge rocks that stood at the northern end of the Bosporos and used to crash together with immense force, crushing anything that was caught between them. As they were drawing close to the rocks – so Phineus advised – they should let loose a dove and cause it to fly between them; if it was crushed by them, they should turn back, taking this as an evil sign from the gods, but if it should pass through safely, they should follow after it, rowing as hard as they possibly could.⁷⁸ After the dove was sent forth by the Argonaut Euphemos, it made a safe passage, losing only the very tip of its tail-feathers as the rocks crashed together; and the Argonauts rowed into the gap with all speed as soon as the rocks began to separate. With a little help from Athena, they fared as well as the dove, suffering only a little damage to the stern-ornaments of their ship.⁷⁹

The *Odyssey* refers to a hazard comparable to the one that the Argonauts had been obliged to confront, the Planctai or ‘Wandering Rocks’. For Circe offered Odysseus a choice of two different routes, one that would take him past Scylla and Charybdis (which was the route that he chose, see p. 509), and one that would take him past these Planctai, which the *Argo* alone had been able to pass. Although Circe’s account is far from clear, it would appear that ships were driven against the Planctai by waves and blasts of fire, and there is certainly no indication that they were supposed to crash together.⁸⁰ Pindar is the first author to report explicitly that the Argonauts had to pass through ‘living’ rocks that did that; he places the incident during their outward journey, as does Euripides in the *Medeia*.⁸¹ Euripides refers to the rocks as the Symplegades, while Simonides apparently called them the Synormades in a somewhat earlier account;⁸² they could also be called the Plegades, Syndromades, and the like, all of these names meaning much the same. These clashing rocks came to be distinguished from the Homeric Planctai because those were located in the far west, and the Argonauts must thus have passed through them during their return journey rather than their outward journey (as is indeed stated by Homer). Apollonius classes the Clashing Rocks and Wandering Rocks as separate perils, accordingly, presenting the Argonauts as encountering the latter at a later time during their return (see p. 409).

Since there were no moving rocks on the trade-route to the Black Sea in classical times, it followed that they must have become fixed at some point if they had ever existed, and Pindar remarks accordingly that the passage of the Argonauts had caused the ‘living’ rocks to ‘die’, presumably because they were fated to stand motionless if a ship should ever pass safely through, as Apollodorus later explains.⁸³

Phineus was sometimes said to have lived on the Thracian coast of the Black Sea at Salmydessos or elsewhere; but if it is supposed the Clashing Rocks were located at the entrance to the Black Sea, it is obviously preferable that he should have lived on the Thracian coast of the Bosporos as in Apollonius' account.

The Argonauts now sailed along the northern coast of Asia Minor until they reached Colchis at the far end of the Black Sea. (viii) They landed next at the desert island of Thynias, where Apollo manifested himself to them as he was travelling north from Lycia to the land of the Hyperboreans. On the advice of Orpheus, they raised an altar in his honour, offered sacrifices on it, and dedicated the island to him.⁸⁴ (ix) When they called in at the land of the Mariandynians further along the coast (in the area in which the Greeks would later found the city of Heracleia Pontica), they received a friendly welcome from the king, Lycos, son of Dascylos, because he was grateful to them for having subdued Amycos and the Bebrycians, who were old enemies of his. In the course of their visit, however, they lost two important members of the crew, the helmsman Tiphys, who died of an illness, and the seer Idmon, who was killed by a wild boar while out hunting. Ancaios, a son of Poseidon from Samos (see p. 568, not to be confused with his Arcadian namesake), volunteered to take over as helmsman, while the Lapith seer Mopsos (a son of Ampyx, not to be confused with the more famous son of Manto) took the place of Idmon.⁸⁵

(x) As they were continuing on their way, they passed the tomb of Sthenelos, son of Actor, a hero who had accompanied Heracles on his expedition to the land of the Amazons and had died there from an arrow-wound during the return voyage. Since he desired to gaze on heroes like himself, if only for a moment, Persephone allowed his ghost to rise up to witness their passing; and they called in at the shore on the advice of their new seer to propitiate him with libations and sacrifices.⁸⁶ (xi) They landed next at the site of the future city of Sinope (just to the east of the northernmost projection on the coast), at the spot where Zeus had been fooled by Sinope, daughter of Asopos, after he had abducted her to that far-off region (see p. 435).⁸⁷ (xii) On meeting with rough seas near the mouth of the river Thermodon, they beached the *Argo* there for a while, but were wise enough to hurry on as soon as they could to avoid any danger of a confrontation with the warlike Amazons who inhabited the area.⁸⁸ (xiii) In the last stages of the journey, the Argonauts called in at the island of Ares, which was inhabited by the fearsome birds of Ares, which could shoot out their feathers like arrows. On the advice of an Arcadian called Amphidamas, who had seen Heracles use a bronze rattle to put the Stymphalian birds to flight (see p. 247), the Argonauts frightened the birds off by shouting loudly and striking their shields. Phineus had ordered them to visit the island because he knew that they would find some useful helpers there, namely the sons of Phrixos, who had been shipwrecked in the area as they were trying to sail from Colchis to Greece (see p. 394). Jason was happy to take them on board, knowing that they would be able to offer invaluable advice on affairs in Colchis.⁸⁹ After skirting the rest of the coast of Asia Minor, the Argonauts arrived at the mouth of the Phasis, the great river that ran through Aietes' kingdom of Colchis.

How Jason gained the golden fleece

As they rowed up the river, they could see Aietes' city of Aia and the towering mountains of the Caucasus on their left, and the plain and sacred grove of Ares on their right. The golden fleece was suspended from an oak in the grove.⁹⁰ After bringing the ship to anchor in a shaded backwater, Jason slept on it overnight with his comrades and set off for the palace on the following morning, accompanied by Telamon, Augeias, and the sons of Phrixos. Although Aietes was highly suspicious, imagining that they were plotting to seize his throne, he entertained them with due ceremony and decided to test Jason's mettle by offering to hand over the fleece if he could perform two formidable tasks in a single day. In the first place, he must yoke two fire-breathing, bronze-hooved bulls to a plough and then plough the intractable meadow of Ares with them; and, after achieving this, he must sow the field with teeth from a dragon and then kill all the armed warriors who would spring up from them. The bulls had been presented to the king by Hephaistos, while the teeth had come from the Theban dragon that had been killed by Cadmos several generations earlier (for Athena had kept some of its teeth and had passed them on to Aietes, see p. 333).⁹¹

The Argonauts were filled with gloom when Jason reported back to them since the tasks seemed to lie beyond the capacity of any mortal. Although Peleus, Telamon, Idas, the Dioscuri, and even the youthful Meleager, volunteered to attempt them nonetheless, Argos, son of Phrixos, urged a more cautious approach, suggesting that he should ask his mother (a daughter of Aietes, see pp. 393–4) to enlist the help of her sister MEDEIA, who was a priestess of Hecate and skilled in magical arts and enchantments; and when this suggestion was confirmed by an omen, it won the approval of everyone apart from Idas.⁹² Now Hera was eager that Jason should succeed in his mission for reasons mentioned above, and she had therefore already taken measures to ensure that Medeia should fall in love with him; for she had approached Aphrodite to ask her to bring this about through the agency of her son Eros.⁹³ Under the sway of the passion thus aroused, Medeia readily agreed to help Jason when Argos' mother Chalciope asked her to do so, and arranged to meet him in secret at dawn at the temple of Hecate outside the city.⁹⁴ She provided him with a magical ointment to render him invulnerable to injury and flame, saying that it would protect him for a day if he rubbed it on to his body, shield, and weapons; and she also advised him on how to defeat the men who would spring up from the dragon's teeth, telling him to throw a stone into their midst from a concealed position to provoke them to fight among themselves before he launched his own attack. Jason responded by promising to take her home with him as his wife.⁹⁵

After making a sacrifice to Hecate during the following night, Jason applied the ointment as Medeia had advised and set off at daybreak to accomplish the tasks. When the fire-breathing bulls rushed forth from their hidden lair, he fended them off with his shield as the flame gushed harmlessly around him, and then forced them to their knees to submit them to the yoke; and, goading them forward with the tip of his spear, he compelled them to plough the meadow of Ares, sowing the dragon's teeth as he passed. The task was completed by mid-afternoon, and the armed

warriors began to spring up from the furrows shortly afterwards. Putting his trust in Medeia's advice, Jason raised a boulder from the ground and hurled it among them without revealing himself; and they duly attacked one another and fought until only a few were left alive, at which point he rushed forward and finished them off with little difficulty. Aietes was so enraged at Jason's triumph that he strode back to the city without saying a word. He had never had any intention of surrendering the fleece, and now gathered his main advisers together to plot the destruction of his unwelcome visitors.⁹⁶ His schemes were foiled by Medeia, however, who stole away from the palace during the night and warned the Argonauts to make a quick departure. Before the sun rose into the sky, she guided the ship to the grove of Ares and led Jason to the fleece. She lulled the guardian-dragon to sleep by chanting incantations and sprinkling a magical potion into its eyes, so making it possible for Jason to snatch the fleece without suffering any danger.⁹⁷

In this version by Apollonius (which may have been based on a similar account by Antimachus of Colophon, a poet of the fifth century BC),⁹⁸ Jason's theft of the fleece hardly ranks as a heroic exploit, but he would undoubtedly have confronted and killed the dragon in the early tradition. In a fairly full account by Pindar, Aietes himself performed the initial task of yoking the bulls and ploughing the field, and then challenged Jason to do the same, promising the fleece to him if he should succeed. There is no mention of the dragon's teeth, but the poet may have expected his audience to fill in that detail for themselves, since this was an ancient feature of the legend, known to Pherecydes, which probably went back to early epic. Jason duly performed the task, with the benefit of advice that he had received from Medeia, to the consternation of Aietes, who told him that he must seize the fleece for himself from the thicket where it was guarded by the huge dragon. At this point, alas, the poet decided to cut the story short, saying that the athlete whom he is addressing (and of course the more general audience too) will be sure to know how Jason cunningly slew the dragon and stole away Medeia. He was also said to have killed the dragon in Pherecydes' account (which would have dated to much the same period), presumably using his sword for the purpose in the true manner of a monster-slaying hero.⁹⁹ In a striking variant that is known only from vase-paintings (making its first definite appearance in the first quarter of the fifth century BC), Jason apparently killed the dragon from inside after having been swallowed by it (see [Figure 18.1](#)). In Euripides' *Medeia* the formidable heroine boasts of having killed the dragon herself, thus taking over the hero's role, but that is exceptional.¹⁰⁰



Figure 18.1. Jason disgorged by a dragon, red-figure cup attributed to Douris, from Cerveteri, c. 470 BC. Vatican Museums, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco. © Adam Eastland/Alamy Stock Photo

In Apollonius' account, as we have seen, Jason and the Argonauts stole away immediately after removing the fleece from the grove of Ares, but there were also accounts in which they left from the palace of Aietes. In an early epic called the *Naupactia*, Aietes schemed to murder the Argonauts while they were asleep after having been feasted by him, but Aphrodite distracted him at the critical time by inspiring him with a sudden lust for his wife Eurlylte. During his absence, the Argonauts took flight on the advice of the seer Idmon, and on hearing the clatter of their feet, Medeia rushed after them, bringing the fleece with her.¹⁰¹ It is not clear whether the fleece was kept in the palace, or had been brought there after Jason had killed the dragon to gain possession of it.

The return voyage of the Argonauts

The object of the journey was now accomplished, and the Argonauts could begin

their return. Although it was commonly agreed that the Argonauts sailed out to Colchis by way of the Hellespont, Bosphoros, and the Black Sea, accounts of their return journey were far more varied. The proposed itineraries can be divided into five main categories.

- (i) It could simply be imagined that they retraced the route of their outward journey, sailing west across the Black Sea and then back to the Aegean by way of the Bosphoros and Hellespont; but although they are occasionally stated to have followed this course in tragedy and later sources,¹⁰² most authors favoured a more adventurous itinerary.
- (ii) In some accounts from the earlier tradition, the Argonauts rowed eastwards up the Phasis to the encircling Ocean and then passed southwards around it until they arrived at the east coast of Africa. Dragging the *Argo* ashore there, they hauled or carried it overland in a westerly or north-westerly direction, either to Lake Tritonis in Libya (which was supposed to have an outlet that opened into the Mediterranean, see p. 410) or to the Nile. After reaching the Mediterranean, they were able to make their way home by a known route. This version can be traced back to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*; Pindar remarks that the Argonauts carried their ship through the wilds of Africa for twelve days.¹⁰³
- (iii) Timagetos, a geographer of the fourth century BC, proposed a westerly route in which the Argonauts sailed back across the Black Sea, rowed up the Istros (Danube), and then made their way to the western Mediterranean by passing down a branch of the river that supposedly led into the Tyrrhenian Sea, from where they could get home by sailing around the south tip of Italy and the south coast of Greece.¹⁰⁴ In reality, of course, it is impossible for rivers to fork in such a way, and some authors tried to relieve Timagetos' account of this implausibility by suggesting that the Argonauts rowed to the headwaters of the Istros and then carried the *Argo* overland (across the Alps!) until they arrived at a suitable southward-flowing stream.¹⁰⁵
- (iv) Apollonius, whose surviving narrative will be summarized below, offers a route that is related to that of Timagetos but has received further elaboration, so that the Argonauts now make use of two fanciful river systems rather than of one alone. For the side branch of the Istros now takes them to the head of the Adriatic rather than to the far side of Italy, and they travel up another great river, the Eridanos (here identified with the Po), to pass to the western Mediterranean by way of the Rhone, which is regarded as a branch of the same river (along with yet another branch leading to the northern seas).
- (v) And finally the historian Timaeus of Tauromenium (died c. 260 BC), inspired by the northern explorations of the Greek seafarer Pytheas of Massalia (Marseilles), proposed a route that took the Argonauts far to the north. Finding that they were unable to escape through the Bosphoros because it was blocked by the Colchians, the Argonauts sailed across to the north-eastern corner of the Black Sea to make their way back through the river Tanais (Don). After rowing up to the source of the Tanais, they hauled the *Argo* overland until they found another river that issued into the outer Ocean in the north. By sailing anti-clockwise around the Ocean, always keeping the mainland to their left, they found their way to the region of Gadeira (Cadiz), and then entered the Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar to sail home again.¹⁰⁶

On discovering that the Argonauts had fled with his daughter and the golden fleece, Aietes hastily assembled a large force of Colchians to hunt them down. Although his son APSYRTOS (or Absyrtos) is said to have conducted the pursuit on Aietes behalf in Apollonius' epic and some later accounts, he was considered to have been no more than an infant at the time in the early tradition, and originally appeared in a quite different role. In the earliest recorded account of his story by Pherecydes, Medeia

seized him from his cot and brought him to the *Argo* at the bidding of Jason; and when they came under pursuit, they killed him, chopped him up, and threw his remains into the river (presumably the Phasis as they were leaving the land of Colchis).¹⁰⁷ Although the surviving summary does not explain why they adopted this brutal measure, it was evidently to cause Aietes to fall behind as he delayed to recover the remains of his child. This is explicitly stated in the corresponding narrative of Apollodorus, which was apparently derived from another source, however, since it differs in some respects; for he tells us that Medeia killed and dismembered the child herself, and indicates that the incident must have occurred rather later, when the Argonauts had reached the opposite end of the Black Sea, since Aietes turned aside to bury his son at Tomoi, a town on the Thracian coast whose name could be interpreted as meaning 'Pieces' or 'Slices'.¹⁰⁸ In some versions from tragedy, on the other hand, Medeia murdered Apsyrtos in the palace at Colchis before leaving, and he is removed from the story at this early stage.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, if Apsyrtos was already an adult, as Apollonius and others present him as being, he was not only available to conduct the pursuit on behalf of his father, but the pursuit could also be thought to have been pressed much further, now that it would no longer have been brought to an early end by Medeia's ruthless stratagem. Apsyrtos continues the pursuit in Apollonius' epic until he is killed at the mouth of the Adriatic; and for a full and detailed account of the return voyage of the Argonauts, it is to his poem that we must turn.¹¹⁰

After leaving the river Phasis, the Argonauts sailed westwards across the Black Sea, stopping off at the mouth of the river Halys about halfway down the northern coast of Asia Minor to offer a sacrifice to Hecate. Remembering that the seer Phineus had advised them to choose a different route on their return, they discussed the matter during this halt and agreed to a suggestion from Argos, son of Phrixos, who proposed that they should sail up the Istros (Danube) and then down to the Adriatic through a side branch of the river. A large Colchian fleet had set out in the meantime under the command of Apsyrtos; after crossing the Black Sea without finding any sign of the Argonauts, the fleet separated into two sections, one passing out through the Bosporos while the other headed for the Istros. Although Hera laid down a trail of heavenly light to guide the Argonauts to the river, the latter section of the Colchian fleet (which was led by Apsyrtos) entered it ahead of them by passing through its southernmost mouth. As a consequence, the Colchians were able to reach the (imaginary) Adriatic mouth of the river ahead of the *Argo* and so block the ship's escape.¹¹¹ They offered generous terms to the Argonauts, promising to let them depart with the fleece if Medeia were put ashore to allow her fate to be decided by arbitration; but Medeia had no intention of submitting to any such process and plotted the death of Apsyrtos to ensure that she would not be detained. By encouraging her brother to believe that she would help him to regain the fleece, she lured him to a secret meeting on the island in the river-mouth where she was supposed to be put ashore; and when he arrived at the appointed meeting place at the temple of Artemis, Jason, who had been waiting in ambush nearby, caught him by surprise and murdered him. As a prearranged signal, Medeia raised a torch to the Argonauts, who massacred the crew of Apsyrtos' ship in a surprise attack and then

rowed through to the open sea with Jason and Medeia. To save them from being pursued, Hera deterred the surviving Colchians by sending terrible lightning-flashes.¹¹²

After the Argonauts had passed some way down the Adriatic, Hera sent storm-winds to carry them back again, for Zeus had been angered by the treacherous murder of Apsyrtos and therefore had other plans for them. The speaking timber on the *Argo* (see p. 399) warned them of his displeasure, and announced that they would not escape the sea and its dangers unless the murderers were purged of their blood-guilt by the enchantress Circe (who was Medeia's aunt).¹¹³ Since Circe's island lay off the west coast of Italy, the Argonauts travelled to the western Mediterranean by the implausible route mentioned above, namely by passing up the Eridanos (Po) and then down the Rhone, here regarded as a branch of the same river. While doing so, they passed the spot at which Phaethon had plunged to his death (see p. 43). After making their way back into the Mediterranean, they called in at the Stoichades (Îles d'Hyères, to the west of Toulon) and then at Aithalia (Elba), where they wiped the sweat from their skin with pebbles from the shore; as a result, the beach has been covered ever since with pebbles that resemble scrapings from human skin. When they finally arrived at Circe's island, Jason and Medeia seated themselves as suppliants in her halls, and she performed the rites that were necessary to purify them from the murder.¹¹⁴

The next stage of the voyage took the Argonauts around the southern tip of Italy to the island of Alcinoos, king of the Phaeacians, whose realm is here identified with the island of Corcyra (Corfu), off north-western Greece. On the way, they were confronted by some of the dangers that would later threaten Odysseus when he passed through the same seas after the Trojan War. As they were sailing past the island of the Sirens – enchanting singers who lured sailors to their death through the beauty of their song (see p. 508) – Orpheus drowned out their voices by strumming a loud and rapid melody on his lyre. One member of the crew, however, a certain Boutes, son of Teleon from Athens, heard enough of their song to feel impelled to jump overboard and swim towards them; but Aphrodite snatched him up from the sea and carried him away to Cape Lilybaeum at the western tip of Sicily (where she was said to have taken him as her lover, and to have borne him a son, Eryx, see p. 252).¹¹⁵ During the most dangerous section of the voyage at the Straits of Messina, the Argonauts benefitted from the unseen help of Thetis and her fellow-Nereids, who guided them between Scylla and Charybdis (see p. 509), and then through the Planctai (Wandering Rocks, see p. 403), propelling the ship from one sister to another as though it were a ball. After escaping these perils and skirting the meadows of Thrinacia where the daughters of Helios herded the cattle and sheep of the Sun, they sailed swiftly across the Ionian Sea to the island of Alcinoos.¹¹⁶

On the very day of their arrival, the Colchians who had sailed out through the Bosporos also arrived at the island and demanded that Alcinoos should surrender Medeia, threatening him with war if he refused. Medeia approached Arete, the queen of the Phaeacians, and appealed to her as a suppliant, arousing such pity in her that she begged her husband to resist the Colchian demands. When Alcinoos replied that he would not separate Medeia from Jason if she were married to him, but that he

would feel obliged to return her to her father if she were still a virgin, Arete sent a secret message to Jason to inform him of the decision. So he married Medeia without delay, and the couple spent their wedding-night in the sacred cave of Macris, lying together on the golden fleece. Macris, the former owner of the cave, was a daughter of Aristaios who had been expelled from her native Euboea by Hera for having tended the infant Dionysos. On hearing Alcinoos' judgement on the following day, the Colchians accepted it without attempting to fulfil their threats and asked to be allowed to remain among the Phaeacians since they were afraid to return to Aietes without Medeia.¹¹⁷

After leaving the island on the seventh day, the Greeks set off to sail around the southern tip of the Peloponnese, but they were blown off course by a violent storm that carried them south for nine days and nights until the *Argo* was finally cast ashore on the desert coast of Libya. On the advice of the guardian-nymphs of the land, they hoisted the ship on to their shoulders and carried it overland for twelve days and nights until they arrived at Lake Tritonis. They lost two of their companions in the area before proceeding on their way, for Canthos, son of Abas, was killed by Caphauros (a local herdsman who was descended from Minos) while trying to rustle his sheep, and the seer Mopsos died from a snakebite. Poisonous snakes had abounded in Libya ever since they had first sprung up from the blood that had dripped from the Gorgon's head as Perseus was flying over the land (see p. 227). After launching the ship on to the waters of the lake, the Argonauts searched in vain for an outlet to the sea. Orpheus proposed that they should set a tripod on the shore as an offering to the local gods for their safe return; and when they did so, Triton, the god of the lake, appeared to them in the guise of a young man and directed them on their way. He also gave Euphemos the clod of earth from which the island of Thera would subsequently grow (see pp. 284 and 411). On reaching the open sea, they sailed east along the African coast and then north towards Crete.¹¹⁸

While searching for fresh water in the neighbourhood of the Tritonian lake (which was presumably salty), the Argonauts came across the nymphs of the Hesperides and asked them where they could find some water. Now it happened that Heracles had arrived there the previous day to steal some of the apples of the Hesperides (see p. 255), and the nymphs were therefore able to point them to a spring that the hero had created nearby with a stamp of his foot. As a result of this sequence of events, Heracles saved the lives of his former comrades even though he had been separated from them long before. The Argonaut Lynceus, who had exceptional powers of sight (see p. 449), thought that he could just see the hero disappearing into the distance, rather as someone at the beginning of the month might see or suppose that he sees the moon through a bank of cloud.¹¹⁹

On arriving at Crete, the Argonauts found that the island was guarded by TALOS, a huge man of bronze who had been constructed by Hephaistos and had been presented to Minos by his creator (or to Europa by Zeus) to fulfil this function. He was also described, rather less appropriately, as the last survivor of the bronze race (even though the members of that race were not literally made of bronze in Hesiod's myth of the races, see p. 31).¹²⁰ He used to keep watch by running round the island three times a day, and would repel unwelcome visitors by hurling rocks at their

ships;¹²¹ it was also claimed that he used to destroy his adversaries by burning them, either by heating himself in a fire and then enfolding them in a deadly embrace, or by simply hurling them into a fire.¹²² He was vulnerable, however, at his ankle, because the single vein that ran through his body was covered by nothing more than a thin membrane at that point, and his life-fluid (*ichor*) would run out if it were punctured.¹²³ Or else the vein had a stopper at the ankle in the form of a bronze nail, which could be pulled out with similar effect.¹²⁴ Although he tried to repel the *Argo* in his usual manner as it approached the shores of Crete, Medeia was able to take advantage of this weakness of his to bring about his death. After first invoking the Keres (Death-spirits) against him, she threw him into such confusion by casting the evil eye on him and sending phantoms against him that he cut his ankle on a rock as he was trying to heave up a boulder, and he expired as his life-fluid gushed out like molten lead.¹²⁵ Or, in an earlier form of the story, she gained access to him by promising to make him immortal and then caused his death by pulling the nail from his ankle. There was also a further version in which the Argonaut Poias, the father of the great archer Philoctetes, killed him by shooting an arrow into his ankle.¹²⁶ When he was safely dead, the Argonauts landed to draw water and rested on the island overnight.¹²⁷

As the Argonauts were sailing north towards the scattering of islands in the southern Aegean, they were engulfed by a night of such impenetrable darkness that it seemed to have risen up from the Underworld. Finding that he was unable to make out a course, Jason prayed for help to Apollo, who revealed (*anephēne*) the little island of Anaphe with a flash of his golden bow. So the Argonauts sheltered on the island for the night, founding a sanctuary there to Apollo.¹²⁸ In response to a prophetic dream, Euphemos hurled the clod of earth that he had received from Triton into the sea nearby on the following morning, and the island of Thera grew up from it (see p. 284). The Argonauts continued northwards through the Aegean islands, stopping briefly at Aegina, and then passed through the straits between Euboea and Central Greece to reach their home-port in Thessaly.¹²⁹

Jason and Medeia in Greece

Jason returns to Iolcos with the fleece and Medeia contrives the death of Pelias

After arriving in Iolcos, Jason delivered the golden fleece to Pelias to prove that he had fulfilled his task, and then set out to sea in the *Argo* with his comrades for one last time, taking the ship to the Isthmus of Corinth to dedicate it to Poseidon, the great god of the sea.¹³⁰ Although it was generally agreed in the classical and later tradition that Jason schemed with Medeia to contrive the death of Pelias, there is no definite evidence for that from before the latter part of the sixth century BC. As has been mentioned, Pherecydes recorded a version of the myth, presumably of quite ancient origin, in which Hera caused Jason to be sent for the fleece because she knew that Medeia would come back with him and cause the death of Pelias (see p. 398); but this cannot have been the only early version, because there was a tradition

from the archaic period that suggested that Jason and the Argonauts attended the funeral games for Pelias, which would have been out of the question if Jason had connived in his death.¹³¹ Nor is there any sign of that in the passage about Jason towards the end of the *Theogony*, even if Pelias is described there as violent and overbearing, for we are merely told that Jason brought the daughter of Aietes back with him in his ship, and that she lived with him as his wife and bore him a son Medeios, who was brought up in the mountains by Cheiron (who lived on Mt Pelion not far from Iolcos). One may suspect that Jason settled down at Iolcos with Medeia under the rule of Pelias in the earliest tradition. This aforesaid Medeios, who was also mentioned as a son of Jason by the early Spartan epic poet Cinaethon, disappears from sight thereafter. He was presumably introduced to provide an eponym for the Medes, serving the function that was assigned in the later tradition to Medos, who was borne by Medeia to Aigeus, king of Athens, rather than to Jason (see p. 413).¹³²

If Pelias was a brutal usurper who sent Jason to fetch the golden fleece to try to cause his death, Jason had ample reason to want to take revenge on his return. Pelias was not always presented as a usurper, however, and other reasons were also put forward to explain his death, namely that it was contrived by his enemy Hera, or that Pelias incurred the enmity of Jason by having caused the death of his father Aison during his absence. According to Apollodorus, Pelias decided to kill Aison to eliminate that branch of the family when he came to believe Jason would never come back, but Aison asked to be allowed to take his own life, and he did so by drinking bull's blood (which was thought to be dangerous because it would congeal in the drinker's throat). Aison's wife, Perimede, cursed Pelias and hanged herself, leaving an infant son, Promachos, who was killed in his turn by Pelias.¹³³ Or else Pelias forced Aison to drink the blood and his wife (here called Amphinome) stabbed herself after he did so.¹³⁴

For whatever reason, Medeia set to work to cause the death of Pelias, ingratiating herself with the daughters of Pelias for that purpose. She told them that she would be able to rejuvenate their aged father by means of her potions and spells; and as proof of her powers, she cut the throat of an old ram (or chopped it up), and then brought it back to life again as a young lamb by boiling its corpse (or remains) in a cauldron together with her magical herbs. Convinced by this demonstration, the princesses killed or chopped up their father, or allowed Medeia to do so, but on this occasion she omitted to add the necessary herbs, and Pelias regained neither his youth nor his life.¹³⁵ In the original tradition, Medeia would have been perfectly capable of rejuvenating Pelias if she had wanted to; some surviving verses from the *Returns*, an early epic in the Trojan cycle, tell how she turned Jason's aged father Aison into a young boy by brewing up herbs in her golden cauldrons, and quite early authors suggested that she even rejuvenated Jason himself.¹³⁶ In rationalized accounts, however, from the time of Euripides onwards, it was explained that she resorted to trickery to deceive the princesses, usually by substituting a new sheep for the dead one.¹³⁷

The daughters of Pelias, who could be called the Peliades in Greek, vary in number from two to five in literary sources and the visual arts. Apollodorus lists

four, Alcestis, Pelopeia, Peisidice, and Hippothoe, while Hyginus adds a fifth, Medousa.¹³⁸ Alcestis was famous in her own right as the noble-minded wife of Admetos (see p. 145). She could hardly have been involved in the death of Pelias, and some claimed accordingly that she was marked out from her sisters as the only one who refused to lay hands on her father.¹³⁹ As soon as the effects of their actions became clear, the Peliades fled into exile or were expelled by their brother Acastos. According to an Arcadian tradition, they settled at Mantinea, where their supposed graves could be seen in historical times; or, in another account, Jason found good husbands for them abroad.¹⁴⁰

Jason was never portrayed as having won the Iolcian throne as a result of the death of Pelias. ACASTOS, the son and heir of Pelias, was usually said to have expelled Jason and Medea from the land after the murder;¹⁴¹ or else Jason consigned the kingdom to Acastos of his own free will, because he had sailed with him as one of the Argonauts. Or else Jason simply had no desire to remain in Iolcos after this gruesome revenge had been exacted.¹⁴² Acastos was best remembered otherwise for the part that he played in the legend of Peleus (see p. 428).

Jason and Medea in Corinth and Medea's flight to Athens

After their departure, Jason and Medea were said to have settled in Corinth, except in an early epic account that suggested that they went to Corcyra (Corfu).¹⁴³ In the standard later version of their Corinthian legend, based on Euripides' *Medea*, they lived there contentedly for some years until Creon, the king of Corinth (not to be confused with his Theban namesake), offered his daughter Glauce to Jason as a wife. Placing social and political advantage ahead of ties of loyalty and gratitude, Jason agreed to accept her, much to the anger and distress of Medea, who begged him to reconsider. When her pleas fell on deaf ears, however, she plotted a gruesome revenge. After rubbing a noxious potion into a fine robe and tiara, she told her two young sons to take them to the palace as gifts for the bride; and when the princess put them on, they burst into flames, causing her to be burnt to death, as was her father too when he rushed to her rescue. As her final act of vengeance against her husband, Medea murdered their two children before taking flight to Athens, escaping there on a chariot drawn by winged dragons that was provided for the purpose by her grandfather Helios.¹⁴⁴

According to a local tradition at Corinth, Mermeros and Pheros, the two sons of Jason and Medea, were stoned to death by the Corinthians themselves for having brought the deadly gifts to the princess; and the spirits of the dead children then avenged their undeserved fate by bringing death to the children of Corinth until the citizens, on the advice of an oracle, appeased them by raising an altar to Phobos (Fear) and offering annual sacrifices to them, which continued until the city was razed by the Romans in 146 BC.¹⁴⁵ Or, in another account, Medea killed Creon with some of her potions and then fled to Athens, setting her sons on the altar of Hera Akraia because they were too young to accompany her. She assumed that Jason would come to their rescue, but some associates of Creon put them to death and spread the rumour that she had not only killed Creon but her own children too.¹⁴⁶

Another story recorded in a Hellenistic source states that the Corinthians came to reject Medeia's rule because she was a foreigner and a sorceress, and they killed her fourteen children, seven boys and seven girls, even though they had sought sanctuary at the altar of Hera. The gods sent a plague to punish the Corinthians for this grave act of sacrilege, and the citizens of high birth were obliged to expiate for the crime thereafter by dedicating seven boys and seven girls each year to perform certain rites in the temple of Hera.¹⁴⁷ As with the local tradition mentioned above, this tale originated as an aetiological legend that was devised to provide an explanation for a cultic practice.

According to a wholly different account of these events that was offered by the Corinthian epic poet Eumelos, the Corinthians invited Medeia to their city to become their queen since the land had been granted to her father by Helios long before, and the throne had fallen vacant in the meantime (see further on pp. 555–6). Medeia ruled there in conjunction with Jason until he discovered that she had caused the death of all of their children at birth, having buried each of them in turn in the sanctuary of Hera in the hope of rendering them immortal. When he abandoned her as a consequence, sailing back to Iolcos, Medeia too decided to leave and transferred the throne to Sisypheos (who was more commonly regarded as the founder of the city, see p. 553).¹⁴⁸

On arriving in Athens after her hasty departure from Corinth, Medeia won the favour of the ruler, Aigeus, by curing him of his infertility. He asked her to become his wife and she bore him a son, Medos, who was destined to give his name to Media and the Medes. When Theseus subsequently arrived in Athens, however, to claim his birthright as the first-born son of Aigeus, Medeia was expelled along with her child for attempting to plot his death, see further on pp. 294–5.¹⁴⁹ In one account, she returned home to Colchis to find that Aietes had been deposed by his brother Perses, and she killed the usurper to restore her father to the throne.¹⁵⁰ Or else her son Medos did so, and then advanced to the south-east with an army of Colchians to establish a kingdom of his own, conquering the lands to the south of the Caspian Sea that would be known as Media thereafter.¹⁵¹ Or, in another account, Aigeus granted Medeia an escort to take her wherever she wished, and she travelled first to Phoenicia and then into the interior of Asia, where she married an illustrious local ruler, bearing Medos to this king rather than to Aigeus as in the usual tradition; and Medos gave his name to the people of the land when he succeeded to the throne.¹⁵²

In contrast to his wife, Jason had no significant adventures after the end of their marriage; only the manner of his death remains to be considered. In Euripides' *Medeia*, he is told by Medeia that he will meet with a shabby death when struck by a falling timber from the *Argo*; and some claimed that she herself contrived such a death for him by persuading him to sleep under the rotting poop of the ship.¹⁵³ Or else he committed suicide in his distress at the loss of his children;¹⁵⁴ or he was killed along with his prospective bride and father-in-law in the fire at the palace in Corinth.¹⁵⁵

It may be said that Jason's star declines in the classical and later tradition as that of Medeia rises, for she comes to be portrayed as an increasingly strong-minded and imposing figure (if not exactly an admirable one) while Jason comes to be shown as

irresolute by comparison and even mean-minded. Euripides' portrayal of the couple in his *Medeia* seems to have played a major part in encouraging this trend. In the early epic tradition, however, Jason would doubtless have been a hero of unimpeachable valour who could rank with other great monster-slaying heroes such as Perseus, Theseus, or Bellerophon.

Notes

- 1 Apollod. 1.9.1, schol. *Il.* 7.86, Tzetz. *Lyc.* 22; Phrixos volunteers to be sacrificed, Pher. 3F98, Hyg. *Fab.* 2; ram first mentioned, Hes. fr. 68, Pher. 3F99.
- 2 Apollod. 1.9.1, Aesch. *Pers.* 70 (Hellaspont etymology), Hdt. 7.58 (Helle's tomb by Hellespont), A.R. 1.256–7 (allusion).
- 3 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.20 (Paian, Edonos), Steph. Byz. s.v. Almopia (Almops) and Edonos.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Apollod. 1.9.1.
- 6 Hyg. *Fab.* 3, cf. *Astr.* 2.20, Serv. *Georg.* 2.140; Hellenic. 4F129 (lies in temple of Zeus).
- 7 Hes. fr. 299, *Naupactia* fr. 8 Davies.
- 8 Pher. 3F100.
- 9 Hes. *Theog.* 956–7, Hom. *Od.* 10.136–9, Apollod. 1.9.1.
- 10 Apollod. 1.9.1, A.R. 2.1140–56; wife as Iophossa, Hes. fr. 255, Acus. 2F38.
- 11 A.R. 2.1150–1.
- 12 A.R. 3.584–8.
- 13 E.g. Hyg. *Fab.* 3.
- 14 A.R. 2.1093ff.
- 15 A.R. 3.594–604.
- 16 Schol. *Il.* 7.86, Paus. 1.44.11.
- 17 Apollod. 1.9.2 and 3.4.3; Paus. 1.44.11 alludes to this version too; cf. Eur. *Med.* 1286–92 (Ino jumps into sea with both children), schol. and Tzetz. *Lyc.* 229.
- 18 Ov. *Met.* 4.415–542.
- 19 Apollod. 3.4.3, Ov. *Met.* 4.531–42; for various traditions about Leucothea and Melicertes, Paus. 1.42.8, 1.44.11, 4.34.4, schol. *Lyc.* 107, 229.
- 20 Apollod. 1.9.2; schol. A.R. 2.514 (plain named after him because he settled there after expelled from kingdom).
- 21 Pher. 3F98.
- 22 Hyg. *Fab.* 4 (supposedly following Euripides).
- 23 Hyg. *Fab.* 2, 3, and 4.
- 24 Schol. *Il.* 7.86.
- 25 Apollod. 1.9.8, cf. Hes. fr. 30.25.
- 26 Hes. fr. 30.1–23, Apollod. 1.9.7; cf. Soph. fr. 10c. Radt and Eur. fr. 14 Nauck (imitation of thunder and lightning respectively), Verg. *Aen.* 6.585–94.
- 27 Hes. fr. 30.24–30.
- 28 E.g. Apollod. 1.9.8.
- 29 Apollod. 1.9.8, Hom. *Od.* 11.238–54 (mating with Enipeus), Hes. fr. 30.24–35.
- 30 Hom. *Od.* 11.247–53.
- 31 Apollod. 1.9.8.
- 32 Schol. *Il.* 10.334, cf. Ael. *V.H.* 12.42.
- 33 See Aristotle *Poetics* 16, 1454b25.
- 34 E.g. D.S. 4.68.2.
- 35 Both faults in Apollod. 1.9.8.
- 36 E.g. Apollod. 1.9.11.
- 37 The parting of the brothers, Apollod. 1.9.9–10, D.S. 4.68.3, Paus. 4.2.5, cf. Hom. *Od.* 11.256–7.
- 38 Apollod. 1.9.14–15.
- 39 Hom. *Il.* 2.763–7; in chariot-race at funeral games for Patroclus, 23.287–565.
- 40 Apollod. 1.9.14; Paus. 2.15.3 (grave).
- 41 Pher. 3F105, Apollod. 1.9.16.

- 42 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.71–168.
- 43 Hes. *Theog.* 992–6, Mimn. 11.
- 44 Schol. *Od.* 12.69, schol. *Theog.* 993.
- 45 A.R. 1.5–17, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 12.
- 46 A.R. 3.66–75, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 13.
- 47 Hom. *Od.* 12.70.
- 48 Eur. *Med.* 1–4, A.R. 1.386, 525 (Pelian Argo).
- 49 Apollod. 1.9.16, Aesch. *Argo* fr. 20 Radt, Antimachus fr. 58, A.R. 1.524–7, Lyc. 1319–21.
- 50 Both explanations of name in D.S. 4.41.3. For Argos and the building of the Argo, see also A.R. 1.18–19, 111–14, 722–4, schol. A.R. 1.4, Eratosth. 35, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.37, *Fab.* 14.
- 51 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.171–83.
- 52 A.R. 1.20–233; cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 14, *Orphic Argonautica* 119–231, Val. Flacc. 1.350–486.
- 53 Apollod. 1.9.16.
- 54 A.R. 1.559–2.1285; for a summary with some material from other sources, see Apollod. 1.9.17–23.
- 55 A.R. 1.559–608.
- 56 A.R. 1.609–913, Apollod. 1.9.17; earlier references to killing of Lemnian men, Pi. *Pyth.* 4.252 (ibid. 253–4, Argonauts compete in games there and sleep with women, on return voyage), Aesch. *Libation-Bearers* 631–6, Hdt. 6.138, schol. A.R. 1.769 on Aeschylus' *Hypsipyle* and Sophocles' *Lemniai*; Hom. *Il.* 7.467–9 (Euneos as son of Jason and Hypsipyle).
- 57 A.R. 1.910–21. Scenes from the visit would have been presented in Aeschylus' *Kabeiroi* (in which Jason and his comrades appeared in a drunken state, Athen. 10.428f).
- 58 A.R. 1.922–1152, Apollod. 1.9.18, Hyg. *Fab.* 16.
- 59 A.R. 1.1177–1357, Apollod. 1.9.19, Theoc. 13, Ant. Lib. 26 citing Nicander (Hylas here a son of Ceux).
- 60 A.R. 1.1349–57.
- 61 Zenob. 6.21 (follows Apollodorus for the Hylas story).
- 62 Ant. Lib. 26 and schol. A.R. 1.1236.
- 63 Hes. fr. 263 (for marriage of Ceux), Hdt. 7.193; Apollod. 1.9.19 citing Pherecydes (= 3F11a), Aristotle *Politics* 3, 1284a16.
- 64 Apollod. 1.9.19 citing Demaratus (to Colchis) and Dionysius Scytobrachion (as leader); cf. Str. 12.4.3, Theoc. 13.74–6 (to Colchis on foot after left behind in Mysia).
- 65 A.R. 1.1358–2.162, Apollod. 1.9.20, Theoc. 22.27–134; the episode was portrayed in a Satyr-play by Sophocles, the *Amykos*, fr. 111–12 Radt, and a comedy by Epicharmus, fr. 6–8 Kaibel.
- 66 A.R. 2.164–233.
- 67 Hes. fr. 254 and 157 respectively.
- 68 Et. Gen. s.v. *opizesthai* (cited under Hes. fr. 157).
- 69 Apollod. 1.9.21 (cited as variant), Istros 334F67.
- 70 Asclep. 12F31.
- 71 Apollod. 1.9.21.
- 72 A.R. 2.207ff.
- 73 Apollod. 1.9.21.
- 74 A.R. 2.234–300; ibid. 434, Harpies went to Mt Dicte in Crete, cf. *Naupactia* fr. 3A Davies (to Mt Arginous in Crete).
- 75 A.R. 2.295–7, cf. Hes. fr. 156.
- 76 Apollod. 1.9.21 (it can be inferred that the Boreads must have died too although this is not explicitly stated).
- 77 E.g. Ibycus 292, Aesch. fr. 260 Radt.
- 78 A.R. 2.309ff.
- 79 A.R. 2.549–609, cf. Apollod. 1.9.22.
- 80 Hom. *Od.* 12.59–72.
- 81 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.207–11, Eur. *Med.* 1–2.
- 82 Simon. 546.
- 83 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.209–11.
- 84 A.R. 2.669–719.
- 85 A.R. 2.720–898, Apollod. 1.9.23; on death of Idmon and Tiphys, cf. Herodorus 31F50–1, 54 (Idmon died during return voyage), Nymphis 432F15, 16.
- 86 A.R. 2.911–29.
- 87 A.R. 2.946–61.
- 88 A.R. 2.962–1000.

- 89 A.R. 2.1030–1225; Phrixos advised them to travel there, *ibid.* 384–9. The birds that shoot out their feathers already in Eur. fr. 838 Nauck.
- 90 A.R. 2.1241–80.
- 91 A.R. 2.1281–5, 3.167–3438, cf. Apollod. 1.9.23; Pher. 3F22a (on origin of dragon's teeth), 3F112 (bulls fire-breathing and bronze-hooved).
- 92 A.R. 3.472–575.
- 93 A.R. 3.6–166, 275–98.
- 94 A.R. 3.609–739.
- 95 A.R. 3.1025–1130, cf. Pi. *Pyth.* 4.220–3, Ov. *Met.* 7.74–99.
- 96 A.R. 3.1163–1407; on fulfilment of tasks, cf. Pi. *Pyth.* 4.224–41, Apollod. 1.9.23, Ov. *Met.* 7.100–48.
- 97 A.R. 4.6–211, cf. Apollod. 1.9.23.
- 98 Schol. A.R. 4.156.
- 99 Pi. *Pyth.* 4.241–50, Pher. 3F31 (in schol. A.R. cit.).
- 100 Eur. *Med.* 480–2.
- 101 *Naupactia* fr. 6–7 Davies; Herodorus apparently offered a similar account, 31F53.
- 102 Soph. fr. 547 Radt, implied in Eur. *Med.* 1262–4, Herodorus 31F10.
- 103 Hes. fr. 241, Pi. *Pyth.* 4.19–39, 251–62, Hecat. 1F18.
- 104 Schol. A.R. 4.262b, 291b, citing Timagetos.
- 105 Apollonius' account, 4.595ff; rationalized accounts, Pliny *N.H.* 3.22, Zosimos *Histories* 5.29.2–3.
- 106 D.S. 4.56.3 (= Timaeus 566F85).
- 107 Pher. 3F32.
- 108 Apollod. 1.9.24.
- 109 Soph. fr. 343 Radt, Eur. *Med.* 1334–5, cf. Call. fr. 8.
- 110 A.R. 4.212–1781, cf. Apollod. 1.9.24–6 (omitting visit to Africa).
- 111 A.R. 4.212–337.
- 112 A.R. 4.338–510. For another account of the murder of Apsyrtos set at a later stage in the voyage, see Hyg. *Fab.* 23.
- 113 A.R. 4.552–95.
- 114 A.R. 4.596–752.
- 115 Sirens, A.R. 4.894–921; Aphrodite bore Eryx to Boutes, Hyg. *Fab.* 260.
- 116 A.R. 4.885–997.
- 117 A.R. 4.998–1222.
- 118 A.R. 4.1223–1637; on Triton episode, cf. Hdt. 4.179, Pi. *Pyth.* 428–37.
- 119 A.R. 4.1393–1484.
- 120 A.R. 4.1638–44 (given to Europa by Zeus), Simon. 568 (given to Minos by Hephaistos), Apollod. 1.9.26 (gives Simonides' story and, as variants, that Talos was a member of the bronze race or was formed like a bull).
- 121 Apollod. 1.9.26, A.R. 4.1644.
- 122 Schol. Pl. *Rep.* 337a, Zenob. 5.85, Eustath. on *Od.* 20.302.
- 123 A.R. 4.1645–8.
- 124 Apollod. 1.9.26.
- 125 A.R. 4.1659–81.
- 126 Both variants in Apollod. 1.9.26.
- 127 A.R. 4.1689–93.
- 128 A.R. 4.1694–1730.
- 129 A.R. 4. 1731–81.
- 130 Apollod. 1.9.26.
- 131 Paus. 5.17.9–10 (Jason and various Argonauts at games on chest of Cypselos).
- 132 Hes. *Theog.* 992–1002, Cinaethon fr. 2 Davies (from Paus. 2.3.7).
- 133 Apollod. 1.9.27.
- 134 D.S. 4.50.1–2, cf. Val. Flacc 1.693–826 (both parents drink bull's blood).
- 135 Apollod. 1.9.27, Ov. *Met.* 7.297–349, Paus. 8.11.2–3; the story can be traced back to the last quarter of the sixth century BC in vase-paintings.
- 136 Aison in *Returns* fr.6 Davies, Ov. *Met.* 7.176–293; Jason in Simon. 548, Pher. 3F113, Lyc. 1315 with schol.
- 137 Euripides in Nauck 2 550f., D.S. 4.51–2 following Dionysius Scytobrachion.
- 138 D.S. 4.50.1–2, cf. Val. Flacc 1.693–826 (both parents drink bull's blood).
- 139 Apollod. 1.9.27.
- 140 Paus. 8.11.3; married abroad, D.S. 4.53.1–2.

- 141 E.g. Apollod. 1.9.27.
- 142 Hyg. *Fab.* 24 (because Acastos had been a fellow-Argonaut), D.S. 4.53.1.
- 143 *Naupactia* fr. 9 Davies (from Paus. 2.3.7).
- 144 Eur. *Med.*, cf. Apollod. 1.9.28, D.S. 4.54, Hyg. *Fab.* 25, Ov. *Met.* 7.394–9.
- 145 Paus. 2.3.6.
- 146 Schol. Eur. *Med.* 264.
- 147 Schol. Eur. *Med.* 264 citing Parmeniskos.
- 148 Eumelus fr. 3A Davies (from Paus. 2.3.8).
- 149 See e.g. Apollod. *Epit.* 1.5–6, Plut. *Thes.* 12.
- 150 Apollod. 1.9.28.
- 151 D.S. 4.56.1, cf. the elaborate version in Hyg. *Fab.* 27.
- 152 D.S. 4.55.6–7.
- 153 Eur. *Med.* 1386–8 and schol.
- 154 D.S. 4.55.1, schol. Eur. *Med.* 1387.
- 155 Hyg. *Fab.* 25.

19

The early Pelopids and the family of Achilles and Ajax

Before following the events of the Trojan War, we must consider the family background of some of the leading figures who became involved in it. In the present chapter, the first of two, we will trace the history of the families of four of the most eminent heroes on the Greek side, namely the brothers Agamemnon and Menelaos, who led the expeditionary force, and the cousins Achilles and Ajax, who were the most formidable of the Greek warriors. The former pair, who were two of the most powerful rulers in Greece as the kings of Mycenae and Sparta respectively, belonged to the **Pelopid** family, which had become established in the Peloponnese at a later period than the other great ruling families of the land, in the time of their grandfather Pelops, who had crossed over from Asia Minor. The other pair, Achilles and Ajax, who were marked out by their personal prowess and came from kingdoms of no great note, belonged to the less familiar **Asopid** family, which was formed from descendants of Asopos, the god of a river of the northern Peloponnese.

Menelaos became king of Sparta only shortly before the outbreak of the war, after the death of his father-in-law Tyndareos, who belonged to the old Spartan royal, which will be considered in the next chapter. As the husband of Helen, who was nominally one of the children of Tyndareos but really a daughter of Zeus, Menelaos was the immediately aggrieved party in the quarrel that broke out between Greece and Troy as a result of her abduction; and since his brother Agamemnon, who naturally hurried to his support, was perhaps the mightiest and wealthiest of all Greek monarchs, the two brothers became the joint leaders of the expedition. The Pelopids were latecomers to the Argolid as well as to Sparta, Agamemnon's uncle Thyestes having been the first Pelopid king of Mycenae, which had previously been ruled by members of the original ruling family of the area, the Inachids. In this chapter we will follow the early history of the Pelopids, up until the time when Agamemnon first became king of Mycenae, leaving it to the next chapter to consider the events that immediately led up to the outbreak of the war, and to [Chapter 22](#) to see how the bloody cycle of revenge within the family was continued after Agamemnon returned from the war.

Although Achilles and Ajax, who came from different parts of Greece, were not originally thought to have been related to one another, they came to be drawn

together into the same family, evidently because of their equivalent stature as warriors, by being classed as grandsons of Aiacos, king of Aegina, and thus as Asopids because Aiacos had been born to a daughter of Asopos. Although the Asopid family became quite extensive as ever more daughters came to be attributed to the river-god, the Aiacid branch of it is the only one that contains major heroes from heroic myth, not only the two great heroes of the Trojan War, but also their fathers Peleus and Telamon. The rest of the family, which consists mainly of eponyms of various places in the Greek world, will require no more than brief consideration. In the next chapter we will pass on to the Trojan and old Spartan royal families, and see how they finally came into conflict with one another, as part of a divine plan that was designed to provoke a great war.

The early history of the Pelopids

Tantalos of Lydia and his children

Although it may be conjectured that Pelops, the founder of the Pelopid family in Greece, originated as the eponym of a Peloponnesian people of related name, presumably the Pelopes,¹ he was already regarded as an immigrant from the east in the early archaic tradition, as a son of TANTALOS, who ruled the lands around Mt Sipylus in Lydia. Tantalos was generally regarded as a son of Zeus, a fact first recorded by Euripides, while later sources add that his mother was a certain Plouto (Wealth), as would be appropriate for a man who was proverbial for his riches.² In addition to enjoying this worldly wealth, he benefited from the special favour of the gods, who allowed him to mix with them on familiar terms and share in their feasts, a privilege that they would sometimes accord to mortals who lived in the very earliest times. But as we have already seen in connection with the mythology of the Underworld, his good fortune tempted him to presumption, and he was condemned to everlasting torment in the world below, where all manner of good things were constantly set before him, but in such a way that he was never able to partake of them (see p. 106). No reason is offered for this when the punishment is first described in the *Odyssey*, but it was explained in the *Returns*, a later epic in the Trojan cycle, that he was not only invited to live with the gods but was also granted the choice of what he most desired, and proceeded to anger Zeus by presumptuously asking to live exactly like the gods.³ Or in a darker tale, which will be considered below, he angered the gods by serving the flesh of his son Pelops to them as a meal. Or finally, in versions which are all too obviously of late origin, he incurred his punishment by abducting Ganymedes (an action normally ascribed to Zeus, see p. 442), or by denying that the sun was a god, claiming instead that it was a mass of incandescent matter (a heresy first ascribed to Anaxagoras, a philosopher of the fifth century BC).⁴

Tantalos also appears in a wholly different tale of crime and punishment, which has no connection with the rest of his mythology. One of the shrines of Zeus on Crete was guarded by a golden dog, a wonderful automaton, which had been fashioned by

Hephaistos; and this dog was once stolen by a certain Pandareos, son of Merops, from Miletos, who took it across the sea to Lydia and entrusted it to Tantalos for safe-keeping. When Hermes came to seek it out at the bidding of Zeus, Tantalos swore by Zeus and the other gods that he knew nothing about the missing dog, but Hermes discovered it in his home nevertheless, and Zeus punished him for his perjury by piling Mt Sipylos on top of him.⁵ As for Pandareos, he tried to escape punishment by fleeing to Athens and then to Sicily with his wife Harmothoe and his three unmarried daughters, but his flight was observed by Zeus, who killed him along with his wife and delivered his daughters to the Harpies.⁶ Or else Zeus turned him to stone, the story is recorded in different versions and the tradition is sometimes confused.⁷

By a wife who is variously named, Tantalos fathered two sons according to the usual tradition, the great Pelops and his relatively obscure brother Broteas, who remained behind in Asia Minor. He also had a daughter, Niobe, who married Amphion, king of Thebes, but later returned to her Asian homeland to die, see further on p. 142.⁸ Very little is recorded of BROTEAS. In the local tradition, an ancient image of the Mother of the Gods on the side of Mt Sipylos (which still survives and was actually of Hittite origin) was identified as having been carved by him.⁹ According to Apollodorus, whose account of him survives only in a rather poor summary, he was a hunter, and he brought disaster on himself through his presumption, for he failed to honour Artemis and boasted that even fire could not harm him; so he was sent mad, presumably at the will of the goddess, and hurled himself into a fire.¹⁰ It is not known whether he lived long enough to inherit his father's throne.

Pelops wins a wife and kingdom for himself in the Peloponnese

While Pelops was still a child, his father Tantalos killed him and served his flesh to the gods at a feast. They recognized the true nature of the meal, however, and soon pieced him together and brought him back to life again, achieving this in some accounts by boiling his remains in a cauldron.¹¹ Demeter alone ate some of the unholy meal, consuming one of his shoulders while she was distracted by grief after the loss of her daughter Persephone; but she compensated him by providing him with a new shoulder of ivory (or else the gods provided the shoulder, or Hermes did so at the order of Zeus).¹² As already noted, this story was sometimes cited to explain why Tantalos was subjected to punishment in the afterlife. It first appears in Pindar, who mentions that Pelops was said to have had an ivory shoulder when lifted out of the cauldron, but finds the story so repugnant that he goes on to suggest an alternative explanation for the punishment of Tanatalos, namely that he stole the nectar and ambrosia of the gods to share it with mortals.¹³ As for the motive of Tantalos in offering the flesh of his son to the gods, we have to rely on the conjectures of late commentators, who suggest, among other things, that he was trying to test the omniscience of the gods.

After this misadventure, Pelops was more beautiful than ever, and grew up into such a handsome youth that he aroused the love of Poseidon, who even carried

him up to Olympos for a while according to Pindar and some later authors.¹⁴ After he was brought down to earth again, his thoughts turned to marriage, and he decided to seek the hand of HIPPODAMEIA, the daughter of OINOMAOS, king of Pisa (the little region of the western Peloponnese in which Olympia is located). He knew that this would be a dangerous enterprise because Oinomaos forced his daughter's suitors to compete with him in a chariot-race on the following terms. The suitor would take her into his chariot and set off in advance of the king, who would wait behind until he had sacrificed a lamb to Zeus; if he caught up with the suitor, as was likely because his father Ares had provided him with a team of divine horses, he would kill him by thrusting a spear into his back; but if the suitor should happen to escape, he could take Hippodameia as his wife.¹⁵ It was appropriate that a man of such violent and brutal nature should have been a son of the god of war, who was said to have fathered him by Sterope, daughter of Atlas, or else, according to the local tradition, by Harpina, daughter of Asopos, the eponym of a small town of that name that lay near Olympia.¹⁶ Some said that Oinomaos cut off the heads of the defeated suitors and nailed them to his house, or fixed them to the pillars of the local temple of Ares or Poseidon.¹⁷ For what it is worth, the mythographers tried to offer explanations for his ruthlessness, saying that he had no wish that his daughter should marry because he had fallen in love with her himself, or that he had learned from an oracle that he was fated to die at the hand of his son-in-law.¹⁸

Twelve or more adventurers had died at the hand of Oinomaos before the arrival of Pelops, who benefitted from an advantage that his predecessors had lacked, that he was able call on the help of his divine admirer Poseidon. In response to his appeals, Poseidon provided him with a golden chariot drawn by winged horses (or else a winged chariot), which would doubtless have sufficed to ensure his victory in the original story.¹⁹ In the standard later tradition, however, an act of treachery by MYRTILOS, son of Hermes, the charioteer of Oinomaos, became the deciding factor. Pelops was said to have corrupted Myrtilos by promising him a night with Hippodameia or a share of the kingdom,²⁰ or else Hippodameia herself interceded with him after falling in love with her new suitor.²¹ So Myrtilos sabotaged his master's chariot by failing to insert the linchpins into the wheel-axes, or by replacing the linchpins with waxen dummies, and so caused the king to be thrown out of his chariot and killed when he set off in pursuit of Pelops.²²

As so often in stories of this kind, Myrtilos gained no advantage from his treachery, for Pelops killed him in his turn soon afterwards, either to save himself from having to pay the promised reward,²³ or because Myrtilos tried to rape or merely kiss Hippodameia, or because she falsely accused him of trying to do so.²⁴ Some claimed that Oinomaos had cursed Myrtilos for his treachery before he died, praying that he should perish at the hand of Pelops. For whichever reason, Pelops pushed him out of his chariot while driving it through the sky, causing him to plunge to his death in the sea below, in the area of the south-western Aegean that was known as the Myrtoan Sea ever afterwards. While falling through the air, Myrtilos cursed the house of his murderer, a curse that was fulfilled in more than ample measure if one is to judge by the bloody history of the family.²⁵ The grave of Oinomaos could be seen at Olympia, as could the ruins of the building where he was

supposed to have stabled his horses.²⁶

As a result of these events, Pelops won not only the bride whom he desired but also her father's kingdom. He married Hippodameia as soon as he had been purified by Hephaistos. Since he was supposed to have given his name to the entire Peloponnese, it was doubtless often assumed that he extended his power far beyond the little territory of Pisa in Elis, and gave his name to the peninsula after conquering much or all of it, as is suggested by Apollodorus;²⁷ but this can hardly be reconciled with the usual traditions about the early history of the other main regions of the Peloponnese. If it is in fact the case that Pelops was originally the eponym of a people called the Pelopes, these would presumably have been associated with a wider area of the Peloponnese than merely Pisa alone.

The children of Pelops and Hippodameia, and exile of Atreus and Thyestes

Plutarch once wrote that if Pelops was the most powerful king in the Peloponnese, it was not so much because of his wealth but because he had so many children, for he married his daughters to men of standing and established many of his sons as rulers of Peloponnesian cities.²⁸ Pindar already credits him with six sons, and many more are added to the list in later sources.²⁹ Most are mere eponyms, however, without any stories, and only three can be said to be of any real significance in major heroic legend, namely **Atreus** and **Thyestes**,³⁰ whose myths will be considered presently, and **Pittheus**, who became the ruler of Troizen in the Argolid and contrived that his daughter Aithra should become the mother of Theseus (see p. 292). To these **Copreus**, the herald of Eurystheus (see p. 245), might perhaps be added if he was indeed a son of Pelops as some late sources suggest,³¹ and **Alcothoos** as an important figure in Megarian local legend. Most of the other sons of Pelops were brought into being to serve as the eponyms of various places in the Peloponnese; for who could be a better father for eponyms of Peloponnesian cities than the man who gave his name to the peninsula itself? Amongst others, we find **Troizen** (who accompanied Pittheus to Troizen),³² **Epidauros**,³³ **Cleonymos** (the eponym of Cleonai in Argolid),³⁴ **Cynosuras**, and **Letreus** ³⁵ (the eponym of Letrinai in Elis). Pelops also had three daughters, **Astydamia**, **Nicippe**, and **Lysippe**, who married three sons of Perseus – Alcaios, Sthenelos, and Electryon respectively – in the western Argolid,³⁶ helping to prepare the way for the subsequent arrival of Atreus and Thyestes.

In addition to his children by Hippodameia, Pelops had another son, **CHRYSIPPOS**, who was either an illegitimate child by a local nymph or a son whom he had fathered by a previous marriage.³⁷ He favoured Chrysippos above his other children, to such an extent that they came to imagine that he might bequeath the throne to him. So with some encouragement from their mother, Atreus and Thyestes eventually murdered him and threw his body down a well. Pelops came to learn of their crime, however, and expelled them from his kingdom; and he uttered a terrible curse against them, praying that they and their descendants should perish in mutual strife. He also vented his fury on Hippodameia in some accounts, causing her to kill herself or to flee to Midea in the Argolid.³⁸ For a conflicting account of the death of

Chrysippos, see p. 342.

In historical times, Pelops was honoured as a divine hero at his supposed burial place at Olympia. The magistrates used to offer an annual sacrifice of a black ram at his heroic shrine, which was said to have been founded by Heracles.³⁹ The Pisaian and Eleians disputed the control of Olympia and of its great festival until the district of Pisa (which was apparently ruled from a city of that name in early times) was overrun by the Eleians, probably in the sixth century BC. Pausanias may be consulted for the local traditions that connected Pelops and Oinomaos with topographical features at Olympia. The only other mythical ruler to be recorded for Pisa apart from Oinomaos and Pelops is its eponymous founder PISOS, a son of Perieres, who had settled there after leaving his father's kingdom of Messenia to the south.⁴⁰

Atreus competes with Thyestes for the Mycenaean throne, and serves his children to him as a meal

After leaving the land of their birth, ATREUS and THYESTES settled in the Argolid. Some mythographers explained that they came to that area because Sthenelos, son of Perseus, invited them to rule Midea as his vassals after seizing power at Mycenae (see p. 342), or because Sthenelos' son Eurystheus entrusted Mycenae to Atreus (who was a maternal uncle of his) when he set off to wage war against the Heraclids (see p. 277).⁴¹ The two brothers later became embroiled in a savage and mutually destructive power-struggle as a result of their father's curse (or that of Myrtilos, see above, or both curses). The trouble began when the Mycenaeans received an oracle ordering them to choose a Pelopid as their ruler after the death of Eurystheus, the last Inachid ruler of the city, who was killed along with his sons while he was trying to eliminate the Heraclids (see p. 278); for Atreus and Thyestes were equally anxious to win the throne of this wealthy and powerful place, and the ensuing contest degenerated into an unscrupulous and bloody feud.⁴²

They could prove their claim most effectively by demonstrating that a portent from the gods favoured one or the other of them, and Atreus was convinced that he had the advantage because a wonderful golden lamb had been born into his flocks. According to one account, Hermes had sent the lamb knowing that it would become a cause of contention, because he wanted to exact vengeance on the family of Pelops for the murder of his son Myrtilos (see p. 421).⁴³ Or else it had been sent by Artemis after Atreus had made her a vow undertaking to offer her in sacrifice the finest beast born in his flocks, but had failed to offer her the golden lamb when it was born, finding it so beautiful that he throttled it instead to put it (or strictly speaking, its fleece) into a chest.⁴⁴ For whatever reason, the golden lamb proved to be no blessing for Atreus, because he was betrayed by his wife Aerope, who had been seduced by Thyestes and secretly stole the lamb to advance her lover's cause. When the Mycenaeans met together soon afterwards to decide who should be king, Thyestes thus proposed that the throne should pass to the one who possessed the golden lamb, a suggestion to which Atreus was naturally only too happy to grant his consent; but it was his brother who then stepped forward with the lamb and was acclaimed as the new king of Mycenae.⁴⁵

This did not prove to be the end of the matter, however, because Thyestes had angered the gods by his manipulation of the portent. So Zeus sent Hermes to Atreus to tell him that his claim would be confirmed by a far more impressive portent than that of the lamb; for the sun would reverse its course on the following day by rising in the west and setting in the east (or else reverse its course forever by rising in the east for the first time, instead of in the west as previously). Atreus therefore persuaded his brother to promise that he would surrender the throne if this prodigious event should occur; or he simply announced that the portent of the lamb would soon be annulled by a far greater portent. In the face of the resulting overt sign of divine displeasure, Thyestes was obliged to abdicate in favour of Atreus, who banished him from the land.⁴⁶

When Atreus came to learn that his wife had committed adultery with his brother and had stolen the lamb for him, he drowned her and lured Thyestes back to Mycenae on the pretence of seeking a reconciliation. He then exacted a terrible revenge on him by killing his sons, boiling their flesh, and serving it up to him as a meal. Thyestes ate the food without hesitation because the heads, hands and feet had been removed to disguise its true nature; but as soon as he had swallowed it down, Atreus produced the severed extremities to show him what he had eaten, and sent him into exile once again.⁴⁷ Thyestes lost three sons as a result of his brother's action, Aglaos, Orchomenos, and Callileon (or Caleos);⁴⁸ or in some Latin accounts, he lost two sons named Tantalos and Pleisthenes.⁴⁹ It was sometimes suggested that the sun reversed its course in horror at the cannibal meal rather than as a portent during the dispute over the succession.⁵⁰

Aigisthos kills Atreus to place his father Thyestes on the throne

Atreus was married, as already mentioned, to Aerope, a daughter of Catreus, king of Crete, who bore him two very notable sons, who would play a central part in the story of the Trojan War, Agamemnon and Menelaos. According to an alternative tradition, however, they were merely his grandsons, as children of his son PLEISTHENES, who married Aerope when she was offered to him by the seafarer Nauplios (see p. 304 for the circumstances).⁵¹ In that case Atreus was married to his niece Cleola or Cleolla, a daughter of Dias, son of Pelops. Or else the pattern is reversed, and Atreus married Aerope while Pleisthenes married Cleola!⁵² All of this makes no practical difference, however, because Pleisthenes, if he was indeed the father of Agamemnon and Menealos, is a shadowy figure who met an early death, leaving his sons to be reared by Atreus.⁵³

Agamemnon and Menelaos were destined to be forced into exile at an early stage, at the beginning at the next stage of the cycle of revenge, when Atreus was killed by AIGISTHOS, son of Thyestes. Aigisthos was conceived to Thyestes by his own daughter, PELOPIA, whom he raped in ignorance of her identity while she was participating in nocturnal rites.⁵⁴ Or else he slept with her knowingly on the advice of an oracle, which told him that she would bear him a son who would exact the vengeance that he so greatly desired.⁵⁵ Or, in a wholly different account in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Aigisthos was one of the children of Thyestes' marriage, who

had escaped the fate of the others because he was still in swaddling-clothes when the others were killed by Atreus.⁵⁶ He would bring twofold disaster to the opposing branch of the family in any case, first by killing Atreus to place his father on the throne, and later, after Thyestes was displaced in turn by Agamemnon, by seducing Agamemnon's wife and conspiring in his murder.

Hyginus offers an elaborate account of the events that led up to the killing of Atreus, in what appears to be a composite version based on tragic plots. After inadvertently eating his children, Thyestes fled to the court of Thesprotos (the eponym of the Thesprotians) in Epirus, and then travelled on to Sicyon, where his daughter Pelopia was staying at the time. He happened to arrive on a night on which sacrifices were being offered to Artemis, and hid himself in a grove for fear of profaning the rites. The dancers were being led by Pelopia, who stained her robes with blood from the sacrifices and went down to a stream to wash; and as she was doing so, Thyestes jumped out of the bushes with his head veiled and raped her. Although neither was aware of the other's identity, Pelopia secured some evidence for the future by seizing her assailant's sword and hiding it away. Back in the Argolid, Mycenae was afflicted by barrenness as a result of the crime of Atreus, and the king was advised by an oracle to fetch his brother back. Knowing that Thyestes had sought refuge with Thesprotos, Atreus travelled to Epirus to seek him out, but found no sign of him because he had departed abroad to his grandfather's homeland in Asia Minor. Atreus did catch sight of Pelopia, however, at the court of Thesprotos, and he asked to marry her in the belief that she was a daughter of the king. After arriving at Mycenae, she gave birth to her incestuously conceived son, and exposed him; but some shepherds suckled him at the teats of a goat (*aiga* in Greek, hence his name of Aigisthos) until he was recovered at the order of Atreus, who brought him up as his own son. Some time later, Agamemnon and Menelaos caught Thyestes at Delphi and brought him back to Mycenae. Atreus threw him into prison and ordered Aigisthos (who was grown up by this time) to kill him. Thyestes recognized Aigisthos' sword as the one that had been seized from him during the rape at Sicyon, and asked him where it had come from; and when the young man replied that his mother had given it to him, Thyestes asked that she should be fetched. She told him that she had seized it during the rape, and then picked it up as if to examine it and plunged it into her breast (for she had evidently realized as a result of the preceding conversation that the rapist had been her father). Pulling the blood-stained sword out of her body, Aigisthos took it away and showed it to Atreus to make him believe that he had killed Thyestes in accordance with his order; and when Atreus was subsequently offering a sacrifice on the shore (presumably in thanksgiving for the death of his brother), Aigisthos took advantage of this opportunity to kill him, and restored the throne to Thyestes.⁵⁷

Agamemnon and Menelaos survive to expel Thyestes

AGAMEMNON and MENELAOS, who were still quite young at the time when their father (or grandfather) Atreus was murdered, were smuggled abroad to neighbouring Sicyon by their nurse. The king of Sicyon sent them on to the court of Oineus, king

of Calydon, in Aetolia on the other side of the Gulf of Corinth, presumably because he thought that they would be safer if they were sent further away. They then came under the protection of Tyndareos, king of Sparta, who presumably met them at Oineus' court while he was living in Aetolia during the period of his exile (see p. 447 for the circumstances), and brought them back to the Peloponnese when he returned home to Sparta.⁵⁸

As soon as the two brothers were old enough, they travelled to Mycenae to recover their father's kingdom. Thyestes sought sanctuary at the altar of Hera, and they allowed him to leave after making him swear that he would settle on the island of Cythera, off the south-eastern tip of the Peloponnese.⁵⁹ Agamemnon then ascended to the throne as the elder brother, while Menelaos returned to Sparta to live at the court of Tyndareos. His destiny would be no less splendid, however, than that of his brother, since he would win Helen, a putative daughter of Tyndareos, as his wife, and would later become king of Sparta when Tyndareos died without an heir (see p. 454). Agamemnon also looked to the family of Tyndareos for a bride, marrying Clytemnestra (Cytainnestra in Greek), a daughter of that king, who bore him a single son, Orestes, and (according to the usual tradition) three daughters, Iphigeneia, Electra, and Chrysothemis.⁶⁰

Such was the way in which the grisly history of the Pelopids, of which this is only the beginning, was portrayed in the standard later tradition. This sanguinary body of myth with its many variations was developed with some relish over a long period of time, notable contributions being made by Attic tragedy. It is indicated, by contrast, in the *Iliad* that power had been transferred peacefully up until this point from one ruler to another. For Homer tells of a wonderful sceptre that had been passed down in the family as a symbol of its rule, which had been made by Hephaistos, who had given it to Zeus, who had given it to Hermes, who had given it to Pelops, who had passed it on to Atreus, who had bequeathed it to Thyestes, who had bequeathed it in turn to Agamemnon, for him to carry as king. So there is no sign as yet of any cycle of revenge and bloodshed.⁶¹ For the later history of the family, beginning with the murder of Agamemnon, see pp. 513ff.

Achilles, Ajax, and the Asopid family

Achilles and Ajax come to be classed as grandsons of Aiacos, and thus as Asopids

As the bravest and most formidable of the Greek warriors at Troy, Achilles and Ajax form a natural pair in much the same way as the two leaders of the expedition, and it was doubtless for that reason that they came to be classed as cousins, even if they were originally thought to have been unrelated, as might be assumed of heroes who came from quite different regions, the northern land of Thessaly in the case of Achilles, and the island of Salamis off the coast of Attica in the case of Ajax. Achilles states in the *Iliad* that he is the son of Peleus and a grandson of Aiacos,⁶² but although the Homeric epics are less informative about Ajax in this regard, saying nothing about the ancestry of his father Telamon, it is never suggested in any way

that the two are related, and most significantly, the title of Aiacydes (meaning son or descendant of Aiacos) is applied quite frequently to Achilles and his father Peleus, but never to Ajax and his half-brother Teucros. There is thus every reason to suppose that Achilles and Ajax had not yet been brought into a common family as descendants of Aiacos. It is impossible to tell exactly when this linkage was first established, by the simple step of classing Telamon as a brother of Peleus; Pindar is the first author to state explicitly that Ajax's father Telamon was a son of Aiacos like Peleus.⁶³

Thenceforth Achilles and Ajax were regarded as cousins in so far as they had a common grandfather in Aiacos, who was the king of Aegina, an island lying in the Saronic Gulf between Argos and Attica. It was explained that they came to be born in different areas because their fathers, Peleus and Telamon, were expelled from Aegina by Aiacos for committing murder within the family, and went to different parts of Greece. Aiacos for his part was said to have been a son of Zeus by Aigina, the eponym of the island, who was herself a daughter of Asopos, the god of a Peloponnesian river that flows into the sea to the west of Corinth.

The myth of Aigina's abduction to the island of Aegina by Zeus provided a model for the development of many other myths of that kind, in which daughters of Asopos were said to have been carried away to different places by one god or another, to found local ruling families through a son borne to their abductor, or simply to serve as eponyms for the place to which they were carried. A sizeable family thus came to be built up, the Asopid family, formed from the descendants of Asopos and his wife, Metope, daughter of the River Ladon.⁶⁴ Most of the daughters who came to be attributed in this way to Asopos were arbitrarily invented eponyms of little general interest, and we will concentrate accordingly on Aigina's branch of the family, which is most relevant in any case to the general theme of this chapter, before casting a quick glance at the other branches of the family.

Aigina, daughter of Asopos, and her son Aiacos, king of Aegina

Zeus fell in love with AIGINA after seeing her by her father's streams in the territory of Sicyon in the northern Peloponnese, and carried her off, taking her eastward past Corinth and across the sea to the island that would be named after her, in the gulf between Argos and Attica. On learning that she had disappeared, her father Asopos set off in search of her, and visited Corinth first of all to ask whether its ruler, Sisyphos, knew anything about the matter, since he could see for miles around from his towering citadel of Acrocorinthos. It happened that the abduction had indeed been observed by Sisyphos, who betrayed the secret to the river-god in return for the creation of a spring on his acropolis. This turned out to be a dubious bargain, however, because Zeus could hardly allow such an indiscretion to go unpunished, see further on p. 106. Nor did Asopos gain any advantage from the information, for when he tried to recover his daughter, Zeus hurled thunderbolts at him to force him to return to his streams. As a consequence, so we are told, coals could be collected from the Asopos from that time onwards (although there is apparently no sign of them nowadays).⁶⁵

On arriving at Aegina, which had been known as Oinone or Oinopia until that time, Zeus settled Aigina there as his mistress and renamed the island in her honour. She bore him a single son, AIACOS, who grew up to become the first king of Aegina.⁶⁶ He had no one to rule over initially, either because the island had been uninhabited before the arrival of his mother, or because Hera had caused the death of the original population after learning that her husband had embarked on a love affair with Aegina. In the latter case, the goddess had achieved her aim by sending a terrible plague or by sending a snake to poison the water-supplies.⁶⁷ Aiacos prayed to his father to send him some people to relieve his loneliness and provide him with subjects to rule over, and Zeus granted his wish by transforming the local ants (*myrmēkes*) into human beings. This story was devised to account for the name and origin of the Myrmidons, the Thessalian people who were ruled by Aiacos' son Peleus and were later commanded by Achilles at Troy; we are to understand that Peleus took some of these Aeginetan 'ant-people' away with him when he departed into exile.⁶⁸

Aiacos was a man of incomparable piety and righteousness. When the whole of Greece was afflicted by a famine as a result of the murder of Stymphalos (see p. 549) or else of Androgeos (see pp. 290–1), an oracle declared that Aiacos alone would be capable of delivering the land from its barrenness, if he were to offer prayers to the gods (or to Zeus specifically) on behalf of all the Greeks;⁶⁹ and whenever disputes arose, Aiacos could be called in as a just arbitrator,⁷⁰ and it was even claimed that he arbitrated in disputes between the gods, even if no specific examples of his activities in this regard have been preserved.⁷¹ His exceptional virtues were duly acknowledged after his death when he was appointed to be one of the judges of the dead or the gate-keeper of Hades (see p. 109).

Pindar recounts a tale, possibly of his own invention, in which Apollo and Poseidon are said to have summoned the help of Aiacos when they were building the walls of Troy (see p. 443 for the circumstances); for as the scholiast explains, the walls would surely have been impregnable if they had been of purely divine construction. Aiacos was an ideal choice for the part because descendants of his would contribute to the fall of the city on two occasions. This is explicitly indicated in the poem through an omen, for we are told that three snakes tried to leap on to the ramparts after they were completed, but two of them fell back and only one succeeded, and Apollo interpreted this as indicating that Troy would be seized at the section that had been built by Aiacos, and not without the involvement of his descendants (i.e. of Telamon when the city fell to Heracles, see p. 261, and of Neoptolemos, son of Achilles, and Epeios at the time of its final destruction).⁷²

Peleus and Telamon are exiled from Aegina for killing their half-brother Phocos

Aiacos married Endeis, daughter of Cheiron (or Sceiron), who bore him two sons, PELEUS and TELAMON; but he also fathered another son out of wedlock by the Nereid Psamathe.⁷³ Although the sea-nymph tried to escape his embrace by turning herself into a seal (*phōkē*) when she was seized by him, he kept a firm hold on her

and caused her to conceive a son, PHOCOS, whom he reared as a member of his own family.⁷⁴ High-minded though he may have been, he mismanaged his family affairs as a consequence, for he became particularly fond of Phocos and favoured him above his legitimate sons, until they grew so resentful that they banded together to murder the intruder, with the approval or even encouragement of their mother. Accounts differ on whether the fatal blow was delivered by Peleus or Telamon, or by both of them jointly. According to the usual tradition, one or the other killed Phocos by hurling a discus at his head while the three of them were exercising together. There were also versions, plainly of secondary origin, in which they killed him because they were jealous of his athletic skills, or simply by accident. Whatever the exact course of events, Aiacos sent Peleus and Telamon into exile on learning of the death of his favourite son, and never allowed them to set foot on Aegina again.⁷⁵ According to a local tradition, Telamon did come back to the island on one occasion to try to persuade his father to allow him to return, but Aiacos refused to allow him even to step ashore to speak, and he thus had to pile up a mound in the sea to speak from there (hence a feature of the local topography).⁷⁶

Telamon remained near his birthplace, settling on the island of Salamis just off the coast of Attica, while Peleus travelled further away to make his new home in the northern land of Thessaly. As has been mentioned, the ancestry of his son Achilles remained formally consistent from the time of Homer, who traced it back to Peleus, Aiacos, and Zeus; but in all probability, Peleus and Aiacos were originally regarded as being of Thessalian stock like Achilles himself, and Aiacos was first transferred to Aegina when the common Asopid genealogy was devised for Achilles and Ajax. Although Homer never refers to Aiacos' mother, merely saying that he was a son of Zeus, she may perhaps originally have been a daughter of the Thessalian Asopos, which flowed into the Malian Gulf in the very region that Peleus came to rule.

Before we consider the further adventures of Peleus and Telamon, something should be said about Phocos in so far as he was the eponym of Phocis and an ancestor of Phocian heroes. This small province in Central Greece, to the west of Boeotia, did in fact have two different eponyms, the other being Phocos, son of Ornytion, a grandson of Sisyphos, king of Corinth. The Corinthian was said to have arrived there first, settling at Tithorea with Antiope as his wife⁷⁷ (see p. 340), while the son of Aiacos arrived a generation later, to live there for a while before returning home to meet his death. He married Asterodeia (or Asteria, or Asteropeia), daughter of Deion, who bore him twin sons, Crisos and Panopeus, who quarrelled even when they were still in their mother's womb (just like Proitos and Acrisios in Argos, see p. 220).⁷⁸ They were the eponymous founders of Crisa and Panopea, two towns that lay on opposite sides of southern Phocis. Since Tithorea, the home town of the other Phocos, lay in the northern part of the province, it could be explained that the Corinthian Phocos gave his name to the northern part of the land while the Aeginetan gave his name to the southern part.⁷⁹

PANOPEUS assisted Amphitryon in his war against the Teleboans (see p. 236), and was the father of EPEIOS,⁸⁰ who made a crucial contribution to the Greek victory at Troy. Being no great warrior even by his own admission, he served the Greek cause in quite another way, by building the Wooden Horse with some help

from Athena (see p. 482). Phocos' other son CRISOS was the father of Strophios, who became a brother-in-law of Agamemnon by marrying his sister Anaxibia.⁸¹ After Agamemnon was murdered, Strophios offered refuge to his young son Orestes at Crisa, and brought him up together with his own son PYLADES, who later accompanied Orestes when he went back to Mycenae to seek revenge, see further on p. 514.

Peleus at Phthia and Iolcos in Thessaly

After being banished from his birthplace, Peleus made his way to Phthia in southern Thessaly, where he was purified by EURYTION (or Eurytos), the ruler of the land. The Phthian ruling line had been founded by Eurytion's grandfather, Myrmidon, son of Zeus and Eurymedousa, who was the eponym of the local people, the Myrmidons; Myrmidon had married Peisidice, one of the daughters of Aiolos (see p. 380), who had borne him two sons including Actor, the father of Eurytion. An alternative tradition suggested that Peleus was received at Phthia by Actor himself. Since Eurytion had no male heir, he invited Peleus to settle in his kingdom, offering him his daughter ANTIGONE as a wife along with a third of the land; Antigone bore him a single child, a daughter called Polydora.⁸² The *Iliad* already refers to Polydora as a daughter of Peleus, mentioning that she married Boros, son of Perieres, but also bore a son Menesthios to Spercheios, the god of a local river; this Menesthios later became one of Achilles' lieutenants at Troy.⁸³ The story of Peleus' marriage to Antigone and purification by Eurytion probably goes back to early epic since it was known to Pherecydes.⁸⁴ Events followed much the same course in the alternative version in which Peleus was received by Myrmidon's son Actor; in that case, he married a daughter of Actor who is named as Polymele or Eurydice.⁸⁵

Along with other leading heroes of the age, Peleus and his host were invited to come to Aetolia to take part in the hunt for the Calydonian boar; and as Peleus was aiming a spear at the boar, he accidentally killed Eurytion instead, and was therefore obliged to depart into exile once again. He sought refuge in a more northerly region of Thessaly, at Iolcos, where he was purified by Acastos, the son and successor of Pelias.⁸⁶ During his stay at the Iolcian court (or perhaps during an earlier visit, since the games in question should properly have taken place before the boar-hunt), he competed in the splendid funeral-games that were held by Acastos after the death of his father. Attic vase-painters liked to show Peleus wrestling with the great heroine Atalanta, contrasting his dark body with the paler body of his female opponent. He was said to have been defeated by her. Or else he competed against Hippalcimos, one of the many sons of Pelops, with greater success, or wrestled with Jason.⁸⁷

Matters took a turn for the worse when Astydameia (or Hippolyte), the wife of Acastos, fell in love with Peleus and tried to arrange an assignation; for when he rejected her advances, she was so aggrieved that she told her husband that he had tried to rape or seduce her. As is usual in stories of this kind (see for instance p. 221), Acastos believed her allegations, but he was unwilling to take action against a guest. So he invited Peleus to accompany him when he and some friends went hunting on Mt Pelion, with the intention of exposing him there to mortal danger.

Peleus met with great success in the hunt itself, defeating Acastos and his companions in a hunting contest; for although they tried to cheat by stealing animals that were killed by him, he took the precaution of cutting out the tongues of his victims, and exposed the deception by producing them from his knapsack. When he fell asleep afterwards, Acastos abandoned him on the mountainside, hiding his sword under a pile of dung to leave him exposed without defence to the Centaurs and wild beasts that roamed the slopes. His sword was a divine weapon incidentally, which had been made for him by Hephaistos. While searching for it after he awoke, he was seized by a band of Centaurs, and would surely have been killed by them if the noble Centaur Cheiron had not come to his rescue. Cheiron then helped him further by recovering his sword.⁸⁸ Or, in a somewhat different version, the gods sent him the divine sword on this occasion because they so admired his virtue in resisting the advances of Astydameia, asking Hermes to deliver it to him to enable him to fight off the Centaurs (or simply wild beasts, *thēria*) who were threatening his life.⁸⁹ There was also a version in which Acastos explicitly told Peleus that he was going to abandon him, saying that this was an ordeal that would reveal whether or not he was guilty of rape.⁹⁰

Peleus was sometimes said to have returned to Iolcos at a later time to exact revenge. According to Pindar, he seized the city on his own without the aid of an army.⁹¹ Or, in Apollodorus' account, which was probably based on that of Pherecydes, he raised an army for the purpose at a later period, enlisting the aid of Jason and the Dioscuri; and after killing Astydameia, he dismembered her body and led the army into the city through her remains.⁹² Some said that he killed Acastos too. A version of this story was apparently recounted in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, for a surviving fragment reports that he brought quantities of Iolcian treasure to Phthia, evidently after sacking the city.⁹³ There were conflicting traditions, however, about the fate of Acastos, and others said that he and his family remained in power in Iolcos, surviving to harry or expel Peleus in his old age, when he was no longer able to defend himself while Achilles was away at Troy (see further on p. 501).

After these adventures, Peleus returned to Phthia to take over the kingdom of his dead father-in-law Eurytion, and he now married the goddess Thetis, who would become the mother of Achilles. This would imply that his first wife, Antigone, must have died in the meantime. Apollodorus provides a very neat explanation for her disappearance, saying that Astydameia provoked her to commit suicide as a further act of revenge against Peleus, by sending Antigone a message which claimed that Peleus was intending to put her aside to marry Sterope, a daughter of Acastos.⁹⁴

Peleus' marriage to the Nereid Thetis and the birth of Achilles

THETIS was a beautiful Nereid sea-nymph, one of the many daughters of the sea-god Nereus and Oceanid nymph Doris (see p. 48). Only in very exceptional circumstances would a divine being of her kind enter into a union with a mortal; her sister Amphitrite became the wife, indeed, of one of the very highest gods, Poseidon. Thetis herself was once courted by both Poseidon and Zeus, but it was fated that she would give birth to a son who would be mightier than his father, and the Titan

Themis, who was gifted with prophetic powers, alerted the two gods to this danger, adding that if either of them should father this son by her, he would wield a weapon mightier than either the thunderbolt or trident. Having gained power by deposing his own father just as his father Cronos had before him, Zeus needed no second warning and agreed with his brother that it would be safer to marry her off to a mortal. Peleus was selected for this honour at the suggestion of Themis because of his exceptional piety. Such is the account offered by Pindar,⁹⁵ who writes elsewhere that Zeus assigned Thetis to Peleus to reward him for his righteousness in rejecting the advances of the wife of Acastos.⁹⁶

Events followed a rather different course in the idiosyncratic account offered in the Aeschylean Prometheus trilogy. We are told in the surviving *Prometheus Bound* that Prometheus has learned from Gaia (here described as his mother and equated with Themis⁹⁷) that Zeus is fated to father a son mightier than himself and meet his downfall if he marries a certain bride; but because he has quarrelled with Zeus and been persecuted by him as a consequence, he refuses to disclose the identity of this bride, even though he is warned by Hermes that Zeus will inflict even worse sufferings on him if he persists in his refusal.⁹⁸ It would seem, however, that in the next play in the trilogy, the *Prometheus Unbound*, he revealed that Thetis was the fateful bride, and so won his release.⁹⁹ This account of the story was presumably invented by the playwright himself for his own immediate purposes. Or in a wholly different version, which can be traced back to the *Cypria* and was apparently recounted in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* too, it was Thetis herself who rejected the idea of a union between herself and Zeus, out of respect for the feelings of Hera; for according to an ancient tradition recorded in the *Iliad*, Thetis had been fostered and reared by that goddess. In that case, Zeus swore that she would have a mortal for a husband because he was so angered by the rebuff.¹⁰⁰

However it came to be decided that Thetis should marry a mortal, this was not a prospect that she would accept at all willingly, and Peleus was thus obliged to seize her by force initially, which was by no means easy because she was a sea-goddess who was able to transform herself at will. He lay in wait for her by the Thessalian coast and caught her by surprise as she emerged from the sea, and then kept a firm grip on her even though she tried to escape from him by assuming all kinds of different forms. In the earliest surviving reference to this story, Pindar reports that she turned herself into fire and a lion with sharp claws and fearsome teeth. Peleus' capture of Thetis can be traced back to the seventh century BC in the visual arts, and her transformations are regularly indicated from the second half of the sixth century onwards.¹⁰¹ It is clear from both the literary and artistic evidence that she was thought to have turned herself into a lion and snake in particular; we know from Pausanias that the chest of Cypselos already showed her with a snake emerging threateningly from her hand (as indication of the respective transformation).¹⁰²

Authors from Herodotus and Euripides onward often locate the incident at Cape Sepia in Thessaly, at the southern end of the eastern coastal district of Magnesia. In connection with the great storm that destroyed part of Xerxes' fleet in the area in 480 BC, Herodotus reports that that part of the coast was sacred to Thetis, and that the Persians offered sacrifice to her and the Nereids.¹⁰³ Later sources claim that

Cape Sepia acquired its name because Thetis turned herself into a cuttlefish (*sēpia*) during her struggle with Peleus, and was at last overpowered by him while in that form.¹⁰⁴ Peleus was sometimes said to have been acting on the advice of the wise Centaur Cheiron when he ambushed Thetis and seized her as his bride.¹⁰⁵ It is likely that this story in which he wins her by his own exertions was of separate origin to that in which she is granted to him by Zeus, even if the two accounts do not necessarily conflict and came to be combined in the later tradition.

In Ovid's relatively late version of this picturesque story, Peleus met with failure when he first tried to make love to the goddess. She liked to ride in from the sea naked on a dolphin to lie down in a cave by the Thessalian shore, and Peleus happened to discover her there one day while she was asleep. When his words failed to move her, he resorted to force, but she proceeded to transform herself, first into a bird, then into a tree and lastly into a fearsome tigress, giving him such a fright that he allowed her to escape. He then sought the help of the gods of the sea, offering libations and sacrifices to them by the shore, until Proteus rose up and told him how his prospective bride could be captured, advising him to bind her fast while she was asleep and then hold her tight however often she transformed herself until she returned to her original shape. On finding herself vanquished by these means, she recognized that he had benefited from divine aid and yielded to his will, revealing that she was Thetis.¹⁰⁶

After Peleus had won Thetis through this rough courtship, their marriage was formally celebrated on Mt Pelion in the presence of the gods.¹⁰⁷ Homer already mentions that they all attended the wedding, Apollo among them with his lyre in hand,¹⁰⁸ and they can be seen advancing in procession towards Peleus' house, some on foot and some in chariots, on some handsome vases from the sixth century onwards, notably the François Krater. This wedding is cited by Pindar along with that of Cadmos (who married the goddess Harmonia, see p. 333) as an illustration of the highest happiness that could be attained by a mortal man;¹⁰⁹ but the happiness of Peleus was destined to be short-lived because Thetis continued to feel that the union was unworthy of her, and abandoned her mortal husband soon after the birth of their only child (or only surviving child) Achilles (see [Figure 19.1](#)).



Figure 19.1. Thetis makes Achilles invulnerable by dipping him in the River Styx. Marble. Thomas Banks (1735–1805), Victoria and Albert Museum.

It is explained in many accounts that she was determined to have an immortal child and left home forever when her hopes were frustrated. In the earliest tale of the kind, from a lost Hesiodic poem, the *Aigimios*, she bore a series of children to Peleus and threw each of them into a cauldron of boiling water at birth to test whether they were immortal; but after many had perished as a consequence, Peleus stopped her from doing the same with Achilles, provoking her to desert him in a fury.¹¹⁰ The Hellenistic poet Lycophron offers a similar story, saying that she killed six sons in succession by hurling them into a fire (presumably for the same reason as above) before Peleus intervened to rescue the seventh, Achilles.¹¹¹ Or, according to another tradition, she took active measures to render Achilles immortal, just as Demeter had with her nursling Demophoon (see p. 95), by dipping him into a fire at night to burn away his mortal flesh, and rubbing his body with ambrosia by day to make it immortal and ageless; but Peleus saw the child writhing in the flames one night and cried out in horror, causing Thetis to abandon the enterprise and leave home forever.¹¹²

According to a story that first appears in Roman sources, she rendered Achilles partially invulnerable at least by dipping him into the waters of the Styx, one of the rivers of the Underworld, soon after his birth. She did not fully succeed in her intent because she was gripping him by one of his ankles and that part of his body never came into contact with the water. It was thus possible for him to suffer a wound in the ankle, as was commonly thought to have been the cause of his death (see p. 477).¹¹³ A similar tale, apparently of earlier origin, was told about Ajax (see p. 433),

and the associated theme of conditional invulnerability appears with some frequency in Greek myth; in the final resort such stories merely serve to emphasize the limitations of the mortal condition. Even if Thetis abandoned her husband, she did not cease to take a sympathetic interest in her son, and was always ready to offer him her help and advice. Peleus lived to a great age; for some stories that were recounted about his later life and final fate, see p. 501.

The early life of Achilles, and how he was recruited to fight at Troy

After the departure of Thetis, Peleus entrusted the young Achilles to the Centaur Cheiron to be reared on Mt Pelion. To ensure that Achilles would come to share in the strength and courage of the most fearless wild beasts, Cheiron fed him on the flesh and viscera of boars and lions and the marrows of bears; and the young hero developed his valour and martial skills by hunting savage lions and boars in the wild hill-country around Cheiron's cave. He also learned to move with exceptional speed by running down stags without the help of dogs. Cheiron educated him, furthermore, in the arts of war and the more peaceful skills of medicine and music.¹¹⁴ It is already mentioned in the *Iliad* that Achilles had learned healing skills from Cheiron, the most righteous of the Centaurs.¹¹⁵

Homer adds that he spent part of his childhood with Phoinix, son of Amyntor, the king of the Dolopians, who instructed him in the art of public speaking and other practical matters.¹¹⁶ Phoinix had become a vassal of Peleus in the following circumstances. His father Amyntor, who ruled Ormenion in Thessaly or Eleon in Boeotia, the father of Phoinix, had upset his wife by neglecting her in favour of a concubine, and she thus persuaded Phoinix to seduce the girl, in the hope that the experience of the love of a younger man would turn her against her aged lover. Amyntor had cursed his son to the Erinyes (Furies) on hearing of this, praying that he should remain childless (as would indeed be the case); and Phoinix had left home as a consequence, and had sought the help of Peleus, who had installed him as king of the Dolopians (Dolopes) in a territory adjoining his own.¹¹⁷ He later accompanied Achilles to Troy, and tried to persuade him to return to the fighting after he withdrew from it (see p. 473); he died at an advanced age while returning to Greece with Achilles' son Neoptolemos (see p. 501).

Achilles finally returned to his father's court as a highly accomplished young man, and it was from there that Nestor and Odysseus recruited him for the Trojan War in the earliest account in the *Iliad*.¹¹⁸ They found him there with his friend Patroclos, son of Menoitios, and both of the young men were eager to go. A more colourful story was eventually told about the circumstances of Achilles' recruitment, for it was commonly agreed in the later tradition that his mother, who knew that he was fated to meet an early death if he fought in the war, hid him away on the island of Scyros, to the east of Euboea. He was entrusted to Lycomedes, the ruler of the island, and lived among the maidens of the court in female disguise.¹¹⁹ When rumours about his hiding place eventually seeped out, Odysseus travelled to Scyros to investigate, either on his own or with Diomedes. To trick the young hero into betraying himself, Odysseus presented some fine clothing and trinkets to the women

and girls of the court, mixing a few weapons among them, and Achilles duly revealed his true sex by reaching out for the weapons.¹²⁰ Or, in a more elaborate account, Odysseus placed some women's goods in the forecourt of the palace along with a shield and a spear, and then arranged for a trumpet to be sounded to the accompaniment of shouts and the clashing of arms; imagining that the palace was under attack, Achilles immediately stripped off his women's clothing and seized the shield and spear. After his identity was discovered in this way, he willingly agreed to depart for the war.¹²¹ It should be remarked in this connection that he was too young to have been one of Helen's suitors, and he was thus not obliged by oath to come to the support of Menelaos as were most of the Greek chieftains (see p. 453).

While Achilles was hiding among the maidens of the palace, he embarked on a love affair with DEIDAMEIA, a daughter of the king, causing her to become pregnant with a son, Neoptolemos (also known as Pyrrhos), who would become a great warrior like his father and fight at Troy in the final stages of the war (see p. 481).¹²² This feature of the legend of Achilles was certainly very ancient, for the *Iliad* already mentions that he had a son of this name who was raised on Scyros, and the *Cypria* told of his love for Deidameia. In the latter epic, however, he met her at a later time, however, when he happened to call in at Scyros after the Greeks failed to reach Troy at their first attempt (see p. 462), and something of that kind was presumably assumed by Homer too.¹²³

Telamon becomes king of Salamis, and fathers Ajax and Teucros

TELAMON, the other exiled son of Aiacos, remained closer to his birthplace, settling on the island of Salamis not far to the north, just off the coast of Attica. Its ruler, Cychreus, had been borne to Poseidon by Salamis, daughter of Asopos (see p. 434), and he was thus related to Telamon; and having no sons of his own, he offered his daughter Glauce to his Aeginetan kinsman and adopted him as his heir. After succeeding to the throne, Telamon remarried at some stage, taking Periboia (or Eriboia), a daughter of Alcathoos, king of Megara, as his new wife; and it was by her that he fathered his only legitimate son, the mighty AJAX (properly AIAS in Greek).¹²⁴

As befitted the father of such a hero, Telamon was one of the greatest warriors of his own generation. He sailed with the Argonauts, joined the hunt for the Calydonian boar¹²⁵ and, in some accounts at least, accompanied Heracles to the land of the Amazons (see p. 250); but he was best remembered for having been the foremost ally of Heracles during the first sack of Troy (see further on p. 261). As a reward for his assistance on that occasion, Heracles offered him Hesione, the daughter of Laomedon, the defeated king, as a concubine; and she bore him another worthy son, TEUCROS, who accompanied Ajax on the second and greatest of the Greek expeditions against Troy. As we will see, Teucros alone would return, because his half-brother committed suicide towards the end of the war (see p. 479).

Pindar relates that when Heracles called in at Salamis to recruit Telamon for his campaign against Troy, he prayed to his father Zeus to ask that his host should be granted a brave and hardy son; and when Zeus sent an eagle as a sign of his assent,

Heracles told Telamon that he would father a son of such a character, and that he should name him Aias after the eagle (*aietos*).¹²⁶ Another tradition stated that he wrapped the baby Ajax in his impenetrable lion-skin (from the invulnerable Nemean lion, see p. 243), and prayed to Zeus to render him as invulnerable; but because the hero's quiver was lying inside the skin and prevented Ajax's ribs from coming into contact with it, Ajax was later able to kill himself by falling on to his sword, as he was traditionally supposed to have done (see p. 479). Although the Hellenistic poet Lycophron provided the earliest evidence for the full story of how Ajax gained this imperfect protection, it was probably quite ancient, since Aeschylus refers to his partial invulnerability and Pindar mentions, apparently in accordance with a Hesiodic account, that Heracles prayed before his birth that Telamon should have a son who would share the quality of the lionskin.¹²⁷

Although Ajax commanded a relatively small contingent at Troy, which had been conveyed from his native Salamis in twelve ships,¹²⁸ he was second only to Achilles as one of the most formidable warriors on the Greek side, and owed his predominance and high standing to his personal qualities alone. In contrast to most heroes of the first rank, who are expected to be accomplished as well as brave, he is slow-witted and a poor speaker in Homer's portrayal; but he possesses a bluff common sense, is straightforward, loyal, and utterly dependable, and possesses unshakeable courage. Known accordingly as the 'bulwark of the Achaeans', he is tall, thick-set, and immensely strong, and he defends himself with a towering shield of Mycenaean design, which is formed from seven layers of bull's hide under an outer layer of bronze.¹²⁹ He is as handy at wielding large stones as more conventional weapons, and is especially effective when the situation seems to be most hopeless. His courage is accompanied by self-will and pride, and it is his pride that finally causes his downfall when the arms of the dead Achilles are awarded to Odysseus rather than to himself (see pp. 478–9). He often fights in the company of his half-brother Teucros, who is a skilled archer, and of his namesake, the lesser Ajax, son of Oileus, who led a sizable contingent of troops from his native Locris in Central Greece. As swift-moving, light-armed warriors, both could take shelter behind Ajax and his tall shield and emerge into the open as circumstances demanded.¹³⁰

Something more should be said about the lesser Ajax since he was not only of significance as a companion of his namesake, but also figured in a very important story of his own set during the sack of Troy. Of opposite nature in many ways to the greater Ajax, he is lightly built and fights as a skirmisher accordingly, wearing only a linen corselet for protection, and relying on his speed and skill as a spearsman rather than any exceptional strength. Although a fine warrior in his fashion, he is a man of unappealing character who was vicious, quarrelsome and impious, and he is disliked accordingly by the other warriors. This is illustrated in the *Iliad* by the manner in which he interacts with his comrades at the funeral-games for Achilles; he abuses Idomoneus in a most insulting manner, provoking that hero to retort that he is the meanest of all the Greeks in everything apart from abuse; and his other comrades are happy to laugh at him shortly afterwards during the foot-race when Athena causes him to slip headfirst into some cow dung to prevent him from defeating Odysseus.¹³¹ The worst side of his character was displayed during the sack of Troy, when he

committed a brutal act of sacrilege (see p. 486), so angering Athena that she imperilled many of his comrades during their return voyage and caused his own death (see pp. 494ff.).

Lesser Asopids

The Asopid family grew ever larger as the mythical tradition evolved and Asopos was credited with ever more daughters to serve as eponyms for places in the Greek world. The next branch to be added after that of Aigina was doubtless the branch associated with Salamis, the only other island of any significance in gulf between Argos and Attica. Aigina had a sister called SALAMIS, who was abducted to the island by Poseidon, where she bore him a son, CYCHREUS, who became the island's first ruler. He won the throne (or merely great glory) by killing an enormous snake, which had been devastating the land;¹³² or else he reared the snake, which was eventually driven out by a certain Eurylochos and went to Eleusis on the mainland nearby, where it became an attendant of Demeter.¹³³ Cychreus was supposed to have manifested himself to the Athenians at the battle of Salamis in the form of a snake that appeared in their ships.¹³⁴ As we have just seen, Cychreus welcomed the exiled Telamon to his island, giving him his daughter Glauce and accepting him as his successor because he had no sons of his own. Pherecydes offered an account, however, in which Telamon was the grandson of Cychreus, as the son of Glauce and a certain Actaios (probably to be distinguished from the father-in-law of Cecrops);¹³⁵ and this doubtless reflects the older tradition in which Telamon was of native Salaminian origin.

Another island that came to be credited with an Asopid eponym was Corcyra (Kerkyra, modern Corfu) in the Ionian Sea off north-western Greece. Corcyra acquired its most important mythical associations at second hand because it came to be identified with the Homeric island of the Phaeacians (Phaiakes), which was visited by Odysseus (see p. 510) and was also introduced into Argonautic myth (see p. 409). In the *Odyssey*, the Phaeacians are an exotic people who have close relations with the gods, and their island of Scherie lies far beyond the everyday world in the furthest reaches of the sea, so far away that mortal visitors are virtually unknown. In view of the nature of his land and people, Alcinoos, the king of the Phaeacians, could hardly be provided with a conventional heroic genealogy in the Homeric account. We are told in the *Odyssey* that he was a son of Nausithoos (Swift sailor), who had led the Phaeacians to their distant land to save them from being plundered by the Cyclopes,¹³⁶ and he was married to Arete (Virtue), who was apparently his sister in the original text of the poem.¹³⁷ A passage which was probably added after the time of Homer makes her his niece, explaining that Nausithoos was a son of Poseidon by Periboia, the eldest daughter of Eurymedon, king of the Giants, and Arete was the daughter of another son of Nausithoos, a certain Alexenor who was shot down in his halls by Apollo while still newly married.¹³⁸ This is sheer fancy, of course, but at a later period, when Alcinoos' land came to be identified with a real island just off the coast of Greece, he and his family were drawn into the heroic genealogies as Asopids. It was explained that CERCYRA,

daughter of Asopos, was abducted by Poseidon to the island that bore her name thereafter, and that she bore him a son there, Phaiax, who gave his name to the Phaeacians (now identified as the primordial inhabitants of Corcyra), and was the father of both Alcinoos and of his wife Arete.¹³⁹ Although Hellanicus is our earliest definite source for this Asopid line, it is quite possible that it was already to be found in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, for it is known that the poem referred to the family relationships of Alcinoos (which it would hardly have done if he had not been given a proper heroic genealogy).¹⁴⁰ Since Corcyra was a Corinthian colony, it is tempting to suppose that the myth of Cercyra was developed at Corinth in imitation of the similar stories that were told about Aigina in relation to Salamis nearby.

Asopos was eventually said to have had twelve or twenty daughters. Diodorus lists twelve, adding the following to those already mentioned: **Peirene**, the eponym of the spring of that name at Corinth; **Cleone**, the eponym of Cleonai in the Argolid; **Thebe**, the eponym of Thebes (sometimes regarded as the wife of Zethos see p. 341); **Tanagra**, the eponym of Tanagra in Boeotia; **Thespeia**, the eponym of Thespiiai to the west of Thebes; **Ornia**, the eponym of Orneai in the Argolid; **Chalcis**, the eponym of the Euboean city of that name; **Asopis** (otherwise unknown); and finally **Sinope**.¹⁴¹ Another Asopid of note is **Harpina**, who was the mother of Oinomaos according to the local tradition in his native Elis (see p. 420).

As the eponym of the Greek colony of Sinope on the north coast of Asia Minor, SINOPE was the Asopid who was carried furthest from home. Zeus abducted her to the site of the future city (a trading-port that is best remembered as the birthplace of Diogenes the Cynic) and tried to win her over by promising to give her whatever she most desired; but she proved to be too clever for him, for she told him that what she most desired was to remain a virgin. She subsequently worked the same trick on Apollo and the local river-god Halys. Or, in another version, she was abducted to the area by Apollo, and bore him a son, Syros, who gave his name to the Syrians who lived in the hinterland.¹⁴²

Notes

¹ This can be no more than a theory, however, since there is no surviving record of a people of that name.

² First named as a son of Zeus, Eur. *Orestes* 5; mother as Plouto, schol. *ibid.* 4, Paus. 2.22.4; lived at Sipylus, Pi. *Ol.* 1.35–7, Pher. 3F38 and generally in the subsequent tradition.

³ *Returns* fr. 9 Davies.

⁴ Schol. *Il.* 20.234 citing Mnaseas, schol. Pi. *Ol.* 1.97 respectively.

⁵ Schol. *Od.* 19.518.

⁶ Schol. *Od.* 20.66.

⁷ Ant. Lib. 36.

⁸ Pelops is already named as a son of Tantalos in *Cypria* fr. 13 Davies; Niobe is connected with Sipylus in Hom. *Il.* 24.605–17, but is not identified as a daughter of Tantalos, as is agreed in subsequent sources from Hes. fr. 183 onwards; on Broteas, see n.10.

⁹ Paus. 3.22.4.

¹⁰ Apollod. *Epit.* 2.2 (it is clear from the context that this must be the son of Tantalos even if he is not explicitly named as such). Ovid *Ibis* 517–18 also refers to a Broteas (identified by the scholia as a son of Zeus, or a son of Hephaistos and Athena) who burned himself to death on a pyre.

¹¹ Pi. *Ol.* 1.35–53 (story mentioned but rejected, cf. Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 386–91), Bacchylides fr. 42 SM (Rhea cured Pelops by putting him into a cauldron), Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3, schol. Lyc. 152, Serv. *Georg.* 3.7 etc.

¹² Pi. *Ol.* 1.26–7 (alludes to ivory shoulder), Lyc. 152–5 (first mentions that Demeter ate shoulder), schol.

- ibid. 152 (contracted by loss of daughter), *Ov. Met.* 6.404–11 (ivory shoulder), *Hyg. Fab.* 83 (Demeter fitted it), schol. *Pi. Ol.* 1.40 (Hermes did so at bidding of Zeus).
- 13 *Pi. Ol.* 1.52–66.
- 14 *Pi. Ol.* 1.40–5, *Lyc.* 156–7, *Apollod. Epit.* 2.3.
- 15 *Pi. Ol.* 1.67–88 (chariot with winged horses from Poseidon, apparently won without help from Myrtilos); full account of race, *D.S.* 4.73, *Apollod. Epit.* 2.3–5; suitors previously killed, *Hes. fr.* 259, *Paus.* 6.21.9–11, schol. *Pi. Ol.* 1.127.
- 16 *Paus.* 5.22.6; *Hellanic.* 4F19a, *Eratosth.* 23; alternatively, Sterope was the wife of Oinomaos, *Apollod.* 3.10.1.
- 17 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.5, *Hyg. Fab.* 84.
- 18 E.g. *Apollod. Epit.* 2.4 (both variants), *Lucian Charid.* 19 (former), schol. *A.R.* 1.752 (latter).
- 19 *Pi. Ol.* 1.67–88 (chariot with winged horses from Poseidon, apparently won without help from Myrtilos); full account of race, *D.S.* 4.73, *Apollod. Epit.* 2.3–5; suitors previously killed, *Hes. fr.* 259, *Paus.* 6.21.9–11, schol. *Pi. Ol.* 1.127.
- 20 E.g. *Hyg. Fab.* 84 and *Paus.* 8.14.11 respectively.
- 21 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.7, schol. *A.R.* 1.752.
- 22 *Apollod. Epit.* (left out axle-pins), *Pher.* 3F37a (substituted waxen dummies); schol. *A.R.* 1.752, schol. *Lyc.* 157 (both versions).
- 23 *Hyg. Fab.* 84, *Paus.* 8.14.11.
- 24 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.8, *Pher.* 3F37, schol. *Il.* 2.104 respectively; see also *Eur. Orest.* 988–96 with schol. 990.
- 25 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.7, schol. *Lyc.* 157.
- 26 *Paus.* 6.21.3.
- 27 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.9, cf. *Thuc.* 1.9.
- 28 *Plut. Thes.* 3.
- 29 *Pi. Ol.* 1.89 (unnamed, three lists in schol. 144); thirteen lists in schol. *Eur. Orest.* 4.
- 30 These were doubtless regarded as sons of Pelops by Homer's time, see *Il.* 2.105–6.
- 31 *Apollod.* 2.5.1, schol. *Il.* 15.639; he is already mentioned by Homer, *Il.* 15.639–40.
- 32 *Paus.* 2.30.8, schol. *Il.* 2.561, *Steph. Byz.* s.v. Troizen.
- 33 *Paus.* 2.26.3.
- 34 *Pher.* 3F20, cf. *Acus.* 2F3; otherwise Cleon or Cleonos, schol. *Eur. Orest.* 4, or Cleone, daughter of Pelops, *Paus.* 2.15.1.
- 35 Schol. *Eur. Orest.* 5 and *Paus.* 6.22.8 respectively.
- 36 *Hes. fr.* 190.
- 37 Schol. *Eur. Orest.* 5, schol. *Pi. Ol.* 1.144; *Hellanic.* 4F157 (by previous wife).
- 38 *Hellanic.* 4F157, schol. *Eur. Orest.* 4 (similar accounts, the former specifying the nature of the curse, and the latter that the corpse was thrown into a well); *Paus.* 6.20.7 (Hippodameia exiled), *Dositheos* 54F1 (Hippodameia committed the murder). See also *Thuc.* 1.9, *Pl. Crat.* 395b.
- 39 *Paus.* 5.13.1–3, *Pi. Ol.* 1.90–6 with schol.
- 40 *Paus.* 6.22.1–2; 5.17.9 (Pisos shown on chest of Cypselos).
- 41 *Apollod.* 2.4.6, *Thuc.* 1.9 respectively.
- 42 For a convenient summary of the ensuing events, see *Apollod. Epit.* 2.10ff.
- 43 Schol. *Eur. Orest.* 995, 998.
- 44 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.10, schol. *Il.* 2.105, cf. *Pher.* 3F133.
- 45 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.11, schol. *Eur. Orest.* 811, schol. *Il.* 2.105.
- 46 *Eur. Orest.* 1001–6 (sun reverses course temporarily to travel east), *Eur. Electra* 699–736 and *Pl. Statesman* 268e–9a (sun reverses course forever to establish present pattern), *Eur. Iph. Taur.* 812–16 (allusion to change of course); Zeus sends Hermes to Atreus beforehand, *Apollod. Epit.* 2.11–12, schol. *Eur. Orest.* 811, schol. *Il.* 2.105; rationalized, *Str.* 1.2.15 cf. *Eur. fr.* 861 Nauck.
- 47 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.13, cf. *Aesch. Ag.* 1590–1602, *Paus.* 2.18.2, *Hyg. Fab.* 88, *Seneca Thyestes* 682ff.
- 48 *Apollod. Epit.* 2.13, schol. *Eur. Orest.* 4.
- 49 *Hyg. Fab.* 88, 246, cf. *Seneca Thyestes* 218ff. (these the only sons named although it is stated that there were three).
- 50 *Ov. Tristia* 2.391–2, *Seneca Thyestes* 776ff., *Martial* 1.45.1–2, *Hyg. Fab.* 88, 258; apparently already in *Sophocles*, see *Anth. Pal.* 9.98.
- 51 *Hes. Fr.* 194, 195.
- 52 Aerope seems to be the mother of Menelaos in the papyrus fragment in *Hes. fr.* 195, even if *Tzetzēs* (under *fr.* 194) quotes 'Hesiod' as saying that Menelaos and Agamemnon were children of Pleisthenes and Cleolla. According to *Apollod.* 3.2.2, Nauplios married Aerope to Pleisthenes, who fathered A. and M. by her (a story probably derived from *Euripides*, see schol. *Soph. Ajax* 1297).

- 53 Schol. *Il.* 2.249.
- 54 Hyg. *Fab.* 88.
- 55 On advice of oracle, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.14 (daughter unnamed), Hyg. *Fab.* 87, schol. Eur. *Orest.* 15.
- 56 Aesch. *Ag.* 1604–6.
- 57 Hyg. *Fab.* 88.
- 58 Tzetz. *Chiliades* 1.456–65 (as inserted into gap in Apollod. *Epit.* 2.15).
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 E.g. Apollod. *Epit.* 2.16.
- 61 Hom. *Il.* 2.100–8.
- 62 Hom. *Il.* 21.188–9.
- 63 Pi. *Nem.* 5.11–12.
- 64 Apollod. 3.12.6.
- 65 Apollod. 3.12.6; that Asopos bribed Sisypheos with offer of spring, Paus. 2.5.1. See also Pi. *Isth.* 8.17–23 and *Paeon* 6.134–40 (both referring to the abduction without details), Pher. 3F119 (S. told Asopos that Zeus had abducted Aigina), Call. *Hymn* 4.78 (Asopos struck by thunderbolt).
- 66 Pi. *Nem.* 8.6–8 with 13, *Isth.* 8.16–24, D.S. 4.72.5, Apollod. 3.12.6, Paus. 2.29.2.
- 67 Ov. *Met.* 7.520ff. (plague), Hyg. *Fab.* 52 (snake).
- 68 Hes. fr. 205, Apollod. 3.12.6, Str. 8.6.16, Ov. *Met.* 7.614–60, Hyg. *Fab.* 52; cf. Serv. *Aen.* 4.402 (transformation story set in Peleus' Thessaly).
- 69 Apollod. 3.12.6, cf. D.S. 4.6.1–2 (drought caused by murder of Androgeos), Isocr. *Evagoras* 14–15 and Paus. 2.29.6 (cause not stated).
- 70 Paus. 1.39.5.
- 71 Pi. *Isth.* 8.23–4.
- 72 Pi. *Ol.* 8.30–52.
- 73 Apollod. 3.12.6, Paus. 2.29.7, cf. Bacch 13.96–9 (two sons by Endeis), Pi. *Nem.* 5.8–13; Phocos as son by Psamathe, already Hes. *Theog.* 1003–5.
- 74 Apollod. 3.12.6, schol. Eur. *Androm.* 687.
- 75 Apollod. 3.12.6 (Telamon kills Phocos), *Alcmaeonis* fr. 1 Davies (Telamon strikes with discus, Peleus kills with axe), Paus. 2.29.7 (Peleus kills), D.S. 4.72.6 (Peleus kills accidentally).
- 76 Paus. 2.29.7.
- 77 Paus. 10.32.6–7, 9.17.3–4 (joint grave of Phocos and Antiope).
- 78 Hes. fr. 58 (wife Asterodia, sons quarrelled in womb), Paus. 2.29.4 (citing Asius = fr. 4 Davies, on name of sons), Lyc. 939 and schol.
- 79 Paus. 2.29.2–3.
- 80 Paus. 2.29.4; as builder of Wooden Horse, Hom. *Od.* 8.492–5.
- 81 Paus. 2.29.4.
- 82 Apollod. 3.13.1, cf. Ant. Lib. 38 (received by Eurytion, son of Iros), D.S. 4.72.6 (received by Actor, who leaves the kingdom to him because he has no heir).
- 83 Hom. *Il.* 16.173–8.
- 84 Pher. 3F1b, 61b.
- 85 Tzetz. Lyc. 175 (Polymele), schol. *Il.* 16.175 (Eurydice).
- 86 Apollod. 3.13.2, 1.8.2, Ant. Lib. 38.
- 87 Apollod. 3.9.2; cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 273 (Peleus victor in wrestling), Paus. 5.17.10 (was shown wrestling against Jason on chest of Cypselos).
- 88 Apollod. 3.13.3, cf. Hes. fr. 208, 209 (Acastos hides Peleus' sword in the hope that he will be killed by Centaurs), Pi. *Nem.* 4.54–61, 5.26–34.
- 89 Schol. Pi. *Nem.* 4.92a, schol. Aristophanes *Clouds* 1063, schol. A.R. 1.224.
- 90 Schol. A.R. 1.224.
- 91 Pi. *Nem.* 3.33–4.
- 92 Apollod. 3.13.7, cf. Pher. 3F62, schol. A.R. 1.224 (killed Acastos).
- 93 Hes. fr. 211.
- 94 Apollod. 3.13.3–5.
- 95 Pi. *Isth.* 8.28–48, cf. Apollod. 3.13.5 (with variants).
- 96 Pi. *Nem.* 5.34–7.
- 97 Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 209–10.
- 98 *Ibid.* 755–70, 944ff., cf. Apollod. 3.13.5, Hyg. *Fab.* 54, *Astr.* 15.
- 99 Aesch. fr. 306 Radt. With schol. Pi. *Isth.* 8.56b and Serv. *Ecl.* 6.42.
- 100 *Cypria* fr. 2 Davies, Hes. *Theog.* fr 210, cf. schol. A.R. 4.790 (combined version in which Zeus persists

nonetheless until he receives the prophecy from Themis), Apollod. 3.13.5; Hom. *Il.* 24.59–60 (Thetis reared by Hera).

101 Pi. *Nem.* 4.62–8 and schol., 3.35–6 and schol., Soph. fr. 561 Nauck, Eur. fr. 1093 Nauck, Apollod. 3.13.5.

102 Paus. 5.18.5.

103 Hdt. 7.191, Eur. *Androm.* 1265–8.

104 Schol. A.R. 1.582, schol. Lyc. 175.

105 E.g. Apollod. 3.13.5, schol. Lyc. 178.

106 Ov. *Met.* 11.235–406.

107 Pi. *Pyth.* 3.87ff., Apollod. 3.13.4 etc.

108 Hom. *Il.* 24.59–63.

109 Pi. *Pyth.* 3.88–95.

110 Hes. fr. 300.

111 Lyc. 177–90.

112 A.R. 4.866–79, Apollod. 3.13.6, schol. Lyc. 178.

113 Statius *Achill.* 1.269–70, Serv. *Aen.* 6.57.

114 Pi. *Nem.* 3.43–53 (hunting exploits), Apollod. 3.13.6 (diet), Statius *Achill.* 2.381ff. (education, diet).

115 Hom. *Il.* 11.831–2.

116 Hom. *Il.* 9.432ff.

117 Ibid. 9.447–84 with schol. 448.

118 Hom. *Il.* 11.765–90.

119 Apollod. 3.13.8; Paus. 1.22.6 (Achilles shown among girls on Scyros in a painting by Polygnotos, fifth century BC, earliest definite evidence for story).

120 Ov. *Met.* 13.162–70, schol. *Il.* 19.326, schol. Lyc. 277.

121 Hyg. *Fab.* 96; cf. Apollod. 3.13.8 (discovered by blowing of trumpet).

122 Apollod. 3.13.8, etc; on his love for Deidameia, see also Bion 2.

123 Hom. *Il.* 19.326–7, Proclus on *Cypria*, with fr.16 Davies.

124 Apollod. 3.12.7, D.S. 4.72.7.

125 E.g. A.R. 1.90–3 and Apollod. 1.8.2 respectively.

126 Pi. *Isth.* 6.35–54, cf. Hes. fr. 250.

127 Hom. *Il.* 2.557–8.

128 Ibid. 7.219–67.

129 Hes. fr. 194, 195.

130 On Teucros, see e.g. Hom. *Il.* 8.266–72; on the Locrian Ajax, 13.701–8, 14.520–3.

131 At games, Hom. *Il.* 23.473ff.; corselet, speed and skill with spear, *ibid.* 2.527–30.

132 D.S. 4.72.3–4, cf. Apollod. 3.12.7.

133 Hes. fr. 226.

134 Paus. 1.36.1.

135 Pher. 3F60.

136 Hom. *Od.* 8.564–5, 6.3–10.

137 Ibid. 7.54–5.

138 Ibid. 7.56–68.

139 Hellanic. 4F77 with D.S. 4.72.3.

140 Hes. fr. 222.

141 D.S. 4.72.1–5.

142 A.R. 2.946–54, with schol. 953 (latter version).

20

The royal families of Troy and Sparta, and the origin of the Trojan War

The culminating event of the mythical history of Greece was the great war, in which Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, and Menelaos, king of Sparta, led a large force of warriors across the sea to attack Troy, a rich and powerful city in the north-west corner of Asia Minor, and finally prevailed after besieging the city for ten years. This was the greatest of the Panhellenic adventures, not only because of its huge scale and long duration, but also because it involved a clash between two different worlds. The conflict was provoked by the abduction of Menelaos' wife Helen, who was carried away by Paris, a son of Priam, king of Troy; and that deed and the resulting war formed part of a divine plan that had been devised to rid the earth of its excessive population. The history of the war, from its first devising to the return voyages of the Greeks, was recounted in the early epics of the Trojan cycle, of which only the two Homeric poems, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, have survived, although some idea of the content of the lost epics can be gathered from testimonies and fragments.

The early history of the Pelopid family, of which Agamemnon and his brother Menelaos (who had only recently ascended to the Spartan throne) were members, has already been recounted in the first part of [Chapter 19](#). In the present chapter, we will trace the histories of the Trojan royal family and the old Spartan royal family, of which Helen was a member, and will then conclude by considering the events that brought these two families into conflict and provoked the war.

When comprehensive heroic genealogies were developed, the families of Paris and Priam at Troy and of Helen and Tyndareos at Sparta were brought together into the same genealogical system, by being presented as two branches of the great Atlantid family, which was formed from the descendants of the seven daughters of Atlas. One of his seven daughters bore the god Hermes to Zeus, while five others bore children who became the ancestors of various royal families. We will briefly consider the other branches of the family before passing on to the two that are our main concern, first the Trojan branch and then the Spartan.

The seven daughters of Atlas and their families

Atlas, a son of the Titan Iapetos (see p. 46), managed to father a fairly large family,

even though he had to perform the arduous task of holding up the heavens; for his wife, the Oceanid nymph Pleione, bore him seven daughters who were of twofold significance.¹ Under their collective name of the Pleiades, they were identified with the seven stars of the well-known star-cluster of that name, and various myths were told of them in that connection as a group; and under their individual names, they bore various children, mostly to major gods, and were thus of genealogical significance as the founders of the various branches of the Atlantid family. Their astral myths will be considered separately in the final chapter in connection with those of Orion (see p. 562), and we will concentrate here on their genealogical function. To summarize the general structure of the Atlantid family, they brought forth the following children and founded the following families:

- (i) The Trojan royal line was descended from **Electra** through her son Dardanos (see pp. 441ff.), while
- (ii) the Spartan royal line was descended from **Taygete** through her son Lacedaimon, whom she bore likewise to Zeus (see pp. 446ff.).
- (iii) The most splendid destiny was reserved for **Maia**, who became the mother of the Olympian god Hermes. For she attracted the love of Zeus, who secretly visited her in her secluded home, a cave on Mt Cyllene in Arcadia, and fathered Hermes by her. Since Hermes was a precocious infant who set off to steal the cattle of Apollo on the first day of his life and left home forever on the second, Maia had little opportunity to devote any motherly care to him.² According to her only other legend, Zeus asked her to rear another Arcadian child of his, Arcas, after the premature death of his mother Callisto (see p. 546). Maia would have been something more than an ordinary mortal in the earliest tradition, and the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* refers to her accordingly as a nymph.³ It is already mentioned in the *Odyssey* that she was the mother of Hermes, but nothing is said in that poem about her own parentage.⁴
- (iv) **Celaino** aroused the desire of Poseidon and bore him an obscure son called Lycos, of whom nothing is recorded beyond the fact that his father transferred him to the Isles of the Blessed and rendered him immortal.⁵
- (v) **Alcyone** bore two children of greater interest to Poseidon, twin sons named Hyrieus and Hyperes. HYRIEUS, the founder of the city of Hyria in eastern Boeotia, married a nymph called Clonia and fathered two sons by her, Lycos and Nycteus, who settled at Thebes and gained considerable influence and power there, as has already been described in [Chapter 15](#) (see pp. 337ff.). Through his daughter Antiope, Nycteus was the grandfather of Zethos and Amphion, who ruled the city for a time (see p. 340). There was also a conflicting tradition that presented Hyrieus as being childless (and indeed wifeless) until three visiting gods provided him with a son, Orion, by highly unconventional means (see p. 561). The most important ruling family in Euboea was descended from Hyrieus' twin brother HYPERES, whose daughter ARETHOUSA had intercourse with Poseidon beside the Euripos, the narrow strait that separates Boeotia from the long island of Euboea, and bore him a son ABAS, who became the first ruler of the Abantes of Euboea.⁶ They are mentioned in the *Iliad* as the people who were commanded by ELEPHENOR at Troy, a race of swift-running warriors who wore their hair long and were always eager to rend the chest-armour of their adversaries with their ash-shafted spears.⁷ Elephenor was a grandson of Abas through his son CHALCODON, who was killed in battle by Amphitryon, the putative father of Heracles, when he led an army across the strait to Boeotia to try to exact a tribute from the Thebans.⁸ Elephenor for his part was killed at Troy by Agenor, a son of the Trojan nobleman Antenor.⁹ Before setting off to Troy as leader of the Abantes, he had offered refuge to Acamas and Demophon, the two sons of Theseus, after their father's throne was seized by Menestheus (see p. 315).

- (vi) **Merope** was the only sister who entered into a union with a mortal, becoming the wife of Sisyphos, the first king of Corinth (see p. 553).¹⁰ She was thus the grandmother of the great hero Bellerophon.
- (vii) And finally, the framers of the Atlantid genealogies made **Sterope** (or **Asterope**) the mother of Oinomaos, king of Pisa (although he was of different birth according to the local tradition, see p. 420). As we saw in the preceding chapter (pp. 420–1), Oinomaos was the father-in-law of Pelops, who won his daughter Hippodameia along with his kingdom by defeating him in a deadly bridal contest; so, if Oinomaos was classed in this way as the son of a daughter of Atlas, the Pelopid family could be drawn into the same genealogical scheme as the other two families that played a leading part in the events that led up to the Trojan War. Sterope was said to have borne him to the war-god Ares, who was generally accepted as having been her father.¹¹

The Trojan royal family

The early history of the Trojan royal family, and abduction of Ganymedes

It is already stated in the *Iliad* that the Trojan royal family was descended from DARDANOS, son of Zeus, and it came to be added in the later tradition that his mother was ELECTRA, daughter of Atlas. She brought him to birth on the island of Samothrace, in the north-eastern corner of the Aegean, along with another son called Iasion (or Eetion).¹² When Iasion (or Eetion) grew up, Zeus struck him with a thunderbolt for engaging in a love affair with the goddess Demeter, or for trying to rape her (see further on p. 114), and Dardanos was so upset by his brother's fate that he decided to leave the island of his birth.¹³ Or, according to another tradition, he had to take to the sea to escape the great flood that struck Greece in the time of Deucalion.¹⁴ Since boats had not yet been invented, he improvised a means of transport by setting out to sea on inflated hides or a raft. He drifted across the waters to the closest point on the Asian coast, stepping ashore in the land that would come to be known as Troy. This land in the north-western corner of Asia Minor was then under the rule of the locally born first king of the land, TEUCROS, who offered a friendly welcome to the newcomer, granting him his daughter Bateia as a wife along with a share of the kingdom.¹⁵

In accordance with a common pattern for first rulers, Teucros was said to have been fathered by the god of the main river of the area, in this case Scamandros (or Scamander in Latin form), his mother being a nymph of Mt Ida. There was also another tradition, however, that suggested that he was of Greek origin, as an immigrant from Crete. In that case, he had crossed over to Asia with his father Scamandros and some Cretan followers; and since an oracle had advised them to settle in the place where they were attacked at night by 'the earth-born', they settled in the Troad after discovering that mice had gnawed their bow-strings and the leather of their weapons while they were camping there overnight, and Teucros named the main local river after his father.¹⁶ This story provided an explanation for the origin of the local cult of Apollo Smintheus (of the mice); the *Iliad* already mentions that the god was honoured under that title at a shrine on Tenedos, just off the coast of the Troad.

Since Teucros had no male children, Dardanos inherited the entire territory after his death, and named it Dardania after himself. At this time, before the founding of the city of Troy, the people of the kingdom were still living on the slopes of Mt Ida, the mountain range that lay to the east of the Trojan plain. Although the *Iliad* credits Dardanos with only a single son, ERICHTHONIOS, later sources from the Hesiodic *Catalogue* onwards often add a second, Ilos (an insignificant doublet of the Ilos, who was the eponymous founder of Ilion, see below).¹⁷ After succeeding to the throne, Erichthonios became the richest of mortal men, so the *Iliad* tells us, pasturing three thousand mares in the marshlands of the Trojan plain.¹⁸ He married Astyoche, a daughter of Simoeis (the god of the second main river of the Troad), and fathered a single son by her, TROS, the eponym of Troy.¹⁹ It should be remembered in this connection that Troy, or Troia in Greek, was properly the name of the land, which was also known as the Troad (Troas), while its main city (which was said to have been founded somewhat later as we will see) was called Ilion, or Ilium in Latinized form. In both ancient and modern usage, however, the name Troy may also be applied in a looser sense to the city too, as the centre from which the land was ruled. Tros succeeded his father as king of the land of Troy and married Callirhoe ('the Fair-flowing'), a daughter of the river-god Scamandros, who bore him three sons, his successor Ilos, the eponymous founder of the city of Ilion, and Assaracos, and Ganymedes.²⁰

GANYMEDES stands out from among the colourless figures in this part of the family history as being someone who was of real note in early myth. He played no direct role, however, in the history of his land, because he was abducted to Olympos in his early youth to serve as a cupbearer to Zeus and the other Olympian gods. His fate is mentioned in the *Iliad*, which remarks that the gods snatched him away to live among them as the wine-pourer of Zeus because he was so exceptionally beautiful, the most beautiful of all mortal men.²¹ Or, according to another early source, the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, Zeus caused him to be swept up to heaven by a whirlwind, to the great distress of his father, who had no idea where he had been taken; Zeus took pity on Tros, however, and not only sent Hermes to tell him that Ganymedes would be living henceforth among the gods as an immortal, but presented him with some divine horses to compensate him for his loss.²² These horses would later become a source of trouble, as was so often the case with divine gifts, when Heracles sought to acquire them (see p. 261). An alternative tradition suggested that Zeus presented a golden vine to Tros (or to his grandson Laomedon) as compensation for the loss of Ganymedes (see p. 481).²³

In what has come to be the most familiar account of the abduction, which first surfaces in Hellenistic times, Zeus sent an eagle (his special bird) to carry off Ganymedes, or else transformed himself into an eagle for that purpose;²⁴ but Zeus is portrayed as performing the abduction in person in his usual form in the earliest artistic representations on red-figure vases. Although it is stated from the beginning that Ganymedes was raised up to heaven because of his beauty, there is no indication that Zeus was thought to have become his lover in the earliest tradition. From the classical period onwards, however, it seems to have been commonly assumed that Zeus abducted him or arranged his abduction with that end in view, as

is first indicated by Theognis and Pindar.²⁵

To return to the history of Troy, ILOS, the eldest of the three sons of Tros, succeeded to the throne and founded the city of Ilion (often loosely called Troy), which became the seat of rule of the kings of Troy from that time onwards. His younger brother ASSARACOS founded the junior branch of the royal family, based outside the city on Mt Ida, of which Aineias would be the most important member; we will return to this branch of the family shortly, after tracing the history of the ruling line.²⁶

According to a story that was apparently based on the Theban foundation-myth (see p. 332), Ilos chose the site of his city by taking a cow as a guide. For, while visiting neighbouring Phrygia early in his reign, he won the wrestling contest in some games that were being held there by the king, and in addition to the ordinary prize of fifty youths and fifty girls, the king gave him a dappled cow at the bidding of an oracle, and told him to found a city wherever it first lay down. So he followed the cow until it sank to the ground on the hill of Phrygian Ate, an eminence on the Trojan plain, and chose that as the site of his new city of Ilion.²⁷ Or, in a somewhat different version, Apollo granted an oracle to Ilos himself, telling him to found the city where he saw one of his cattle fall to the ground while driving the herd towards neighbouring Mysia.²⁸ After observing the appointed sign, he prayed to Zeus for confirmation; and when he emerged from his tent on the following morning, he found that a wooden effigy (*xoanon*) of Pallas Athene had fallen from the sky during the night and was lying on the ground outside.²⁹ This statue, which was known as the Palladion (i.e. effigy of Pallas Athene; Palladium in Latin form), would serve as a protective talisman for Ilion; Ilos raised a magnificent temple to Athena to house it, where it remained until Odysseus stole it in the final stages of the Trojan War to deprive the Trojans of its protective power (see p. 481). The tomb of Ilos is mentioned in the *Iliad* as a landmark on the Trojan plain.³⁰

Laomedon and his son and successor Priam

Ilos and his wife Eurydice, daughter of Adrastus, had a single son LAOMEDON, who succeeded to the throne.³¹ Laomedon had a large family of sons and daughters of whom three alone need concern us, Tithonos, Priam, and Hesione. Tithonos was famous for having aroused the love of the dawn-goddess Eos; he was carried off by her and gained immortality, but in such a form that it proved to be of little benefit to him, see further on pp. 44–5. The goddess bore him a son, Memnon, who fought as an ally of the Trojans in the final stages of the Trojan War (see p. 476). Priam is familiar from the Homeric epics as the king of Troy at the time of that war, while his sister Hesione was centrally involved, as we will see, in the events that led to Laomedon's downfall and Priam's rise to power.

Laomedon was a powerful but heedlessly arrogant ruler who brought disaster on himself and his people by two dishonourable acts of ingratitude, first towards Apollo and Poseidon and then towards Heracles. The two gods were once obliged to serve him as labourers for a year as a penalty for having rebelled against Zeus; or else they submitted themselves to him of their own accord to test whether he was really as

presumptuous as he was reputed to be. While they were staying with him, they fortified Ilion with massive walls on the agreement that they would receive a fee for their work; but when the work was completed, Laomedon not only refused to pay them but treated them in a most insulting manner, threatening to sell them into slavery and cut off their ears. To punish the king for his duplicity, Apollo sent a plague, while Poseidon sent a flood and a fearsome sea-monster to prey on the inhabitants of the land.³²

The arrival of this monster set in course the train of events that would lead Laomedon to commit his second act of ingratitude. The Trojans learned from oracles that they would be delivered from the monster if the king would expose his daughter HESIONE to it; so he fastened her to some rocks by the seashore, where Heracles happened to catch sight of her as he was sailing past Troy on his way to the land of the Amazons (or was sailing to Colchis with the Argonauts). As has already been recounted in [Chapter 11](#), he promised to save Hesione in return for the divine horses that had been presented to Tros as compensation for the loss of Ganymedes; but when he tried to claim his reward after fulfilling the task, Laomedon refused to hand over the horses, or tried to substitute mortal ones. So he returned at a later date with a sizeable force of allies and sacked Ilion for the first time in its history, killing Laomedon and all of his sons apart from the youngest, PRIAM (see further on p. 260). He offered Hesione to Telamon, king of Salamis, who had fought as his ally, and allowed her to choose whomever she wished from among the captives. So she released her only surviving brother, ransoming him with her veil; after having originally been called Podarces, he was now given his familiar name of Priam because she ‘purchased’ him in this way (as though his name were derived from *priamai*, to buy).³³

Priam succeeded to the throne and continued to rule at Troy until the city was burned down and he himself was killed at the end of the Trojan War. In the light of the fine portrait that is offered by Homer, who presents him as a noble and sympathetic character, it is possible to imagine him as a living individual, by contrast to his predecessors. He makes his most telling appearances in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, as he talks to Helen and the Trojan elders on the ramparts of the city, and in the final book, when he visits Achilles to seek the return of Hector’s body. The poem credits him with fifty sons, nineteen of whom were born to him by his wife HECUBA (properly Hecabe in Greek), and with many female children too, including twelve married daughters who lived with him in the palace. His sons slept with their wives in fifty adjoining chambers of polished stone, while the afore-mentioned daughters slept with their husbands in twelve chambers on the opposite side of the courtyard.³⁴ As these arrangements would suggest, the royal family dominated the life of the city, and the fighting in wartime, in a manner that was foreign to the Greeks.

The most notable sons of Priam will be considered later in connection with the part that they played in the Trojan War (see p. 469). Since Priam was too old to fight in person, his eldest son Hector was the leading warrior on the Trojan side. For the present we will concentrate on Paris, who was marked out for a special role that would set him apart from his brothers, as the one who was destined to provoke the

The birth and early life of Paris

Although Homer gives no indication that there were any exceptional events associated with the birth of Paris, it was commonly agreed in the later tradition that Hecuba was disturbed during her pregnancy by a sinister dream, which caused Priam to order that her new-born child should be exposed. In the earliest such account by Pindar, she dreamed that she gave birth to a fire-breathing Hundred-Handed Erinyes (Fury) who hurled the entire city to the ground; or else she saw herself giving birth to a flaming torch, which burned down the city, and perhaps the forests of Mt Ida too. Priam consulted the diviners, who could hardly have found it difficult to interpret this particular dream, and was advised that the forthcoming child should be exposed at birth to ensure that it could never bring any harm to the city. Or else, he ordered that the child should be killed at birth, but the servants who were appointed to carry out the task took pity on it and exposed it instead. The child was rescued by some shepherds, as is usual in such legends, after being exposed on Mt Ida, and was then reared in the hills in rural isolation.³⁵ Some said that he was suckled by a she-bear for a number of days until he was discovered.³⁶

In a different account of these events recorded by the Hellenistic poet Lycophron and his commentators, Priam consulted a local oracle about his kingdom shortly after the birth of Paris, and was ordered to kill the woman who had just given birth along with her new-born child; but it so happened that Cilla, a sister of Hecuba, who was married to a Trojan elder called Thymoites, had given birth to a child at the very same time as the result of a secret love affair with Priam, and thinking that the oracle had these two in mind, Priam put Cilla and her son Mounippos to death rather than Hecuba and Paris.³⁷

The abandoned child was named Paris by his rescuer and grew up to become a sturdy young man. He was peculiar for having two names, which were used interchangeably in ancient times from Homer onwards, even if he is always called Paris nowadays; for he was also called Alexandros (Alexander, effectively meaning 'Warrior'). Some said that this was the original name that had been conferred on him by his parents, while others said that it was bestowed on him by the shepherds because he was so brave in 'repelling' robbers and 'defending' the livestock (in accordance with meanings of the Greek verb *alexō*).³⁸

The young Paris became a herdsman who devoted every care to the tending of his livestock. One day, however, a favourite bull of his was seized and taken away by some servants of Priam; for the king, who naturally supposed that his exposed son was long dead, had decided to hold some games in memory of him, and had sent some men out into the countryside to fetch a suitable prize. On seeing them leading his bull away, Paris ran after them to demand an explanation, and was told about the games. So he went to Troy to win his bull back again and proved victorious in every contest, defeating every rival including his brothers. One of them, Deiphobos, was so angry at being defeated by someone who was apparently a mere commoner that he drew his sword against him, causing him to take refuge at the altar of Zeus

Herceios, but his true identity was revealed soon afterwards by his prophetic sister Cassandra. These events were portrayed in a lost play by Euripides, in which Hecuba initially urged her sons to kill the stranger.³⁹

Priam now acknowledged Paris as his son, and invited him to assume his rightful position as a member of the royal family, as though his mother's ill-omened dream were no longer of significance. But the divine plan that would cause him to bring disaster to Troy was still underway, and it would be set in full course when Hermes brought three goddesses to Paris to be judged for their beauty (see p. 477). Before considering this divine plan and seeing how it led him to abduct Helen from her Spartan homeland, we must trace the history of the Spartan royal family of which she was a member, after turning aside for a moment to consider the junior branch of the Trojan royal family.

Aineias and the junior branch of the Trojan royal family

The junior branch of the Trojan royal family was founded by ASSARACOS, one of two younger sons of Tros, who lived outside the city on Mt Ida and fathered a son CAPYS by Hieromneme, daughter of Simoeis.⁴⁰ This Capys, who has no stories of his own, had a very handsome son called ANCHISES, who attracted the love of Aphrodite. For either, through the machinations of Zeus, who wanted to exact appropriate revenge for the trouble that she had brought to him and the other gods by inspiring them with love for mortals,⁴¹ or else simply at the prompting of her own desire, Aphrodite conceived a passion for the young Anchises and visited him one day while he was tending his cattle on Mt Ida.

As the story is recounted in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, she went to her precinct at Paphos on Cyprus beforehand to be bathed and bedecked by the Graces, and then assumed the guise of a Phrygian princess to approach Anchises, so that he should not be frightened off by seeing her in her true nature as a goddess. She told him that Hermes had carried her away to Mt Ida so that she should become his wife, and proposed that they should consummate their union without delay. Under the influence of the desire that she inspired in him, he then took her by the hand and led her to his bed, which was covered with soft pelts of bears and lions that he had killed in the high mountains. She put him to sleep for a while after their love-making, and finally revealed her true identity when he awoke.⁴² He was much alarmed, fearing that anyone who lies with a goddess would be impotent ever afterwards, but she reassured him and told him that she would bear him a son, AINEIAS (Aeneas in Latin form), who would be reared by the mountain nymphs until she placed the child in his own hands in his fifth year.

Before leaving, she ordered him to say nothing of their encounter and to pass off Aineias as a child whom he had fathered by a local nymph, warning him that Zeus would strike him with a thunderbolt if he was foolish enough to boast of having slept with her.⁴³ In some later sources, it is stated that Zeus did in fact punish him in that way for revealing the secret (while drunk, in one version), and that he was crippled or blinded as a consequence. This feature of the story may perhaps have been quite ancient, and it certainly seems to have been familiar by the classical period since

Sophocles referred to Anchises' 'thunder-stricken back' in a lost play.⁴⁴ There is only one other tale to record of him from his earlier years, one from the *Iliad* in which he is said to have secretly mated some of his mares with the divine horses that Tros had received from Zeus in compensation for the abduction of Ganymedes. Of the six fine horses that were born as a result, he kept four for himself and gave two to his son Aineias to be used as chariot-horses.⁴⁵ Anchises will reappear later in another guise, as the old man who is rescued from the burning city of Troy by Aineias when it finally falls to the Greeks, see p. 487.

In the Homeric hymn, as we have seen, the young Aineias was initially reared by mountain nymphs, although the *Iliad* states otherwise, saying that he was brought up in the house of Alcothoos, the husband of Anchises' eldest daughter Hippodameia.⁴⁶ He would later have lived with his father on Mt Ida in any case. Like Paris, who also lived outside the city before becoming reunited with his family, he was something of an outsider who stood apart from the rest of the royal family. His branch of the family was cast into the shade by the senior branch that ruled from the city, and the *Iliad* presents him as feeling some resentment at his position, especially when he feels that Priam is failing to pay him the honour that he deserves. He first became involved in the Trojan War when Achilles came to Mt Ida to seize his cattle (see p. 469), and caused him to seek refuge in the town of Lyrnessos down below. Although an estimable warrior, he is by no means overwhelming in battle in Homer's portrayal, and only survives his moments of greatest peril because deities come to his aid, as when Aphrodite and Apollo save him from Diomedes, and Poseidon from Achilles. As this divine support might suggest, a special destiny was reserved for him, and Poseidon explains to the other gods on the latter occasion that he is fated to survive so that the Trojan royal family may not perish without trace after the destruction of Priam's branch of it.⁴⁷ For in the original tradition, before he became connected with the origin of Rome, he was marked out to become the new ruler of Troy after the fall of the city. The same function was indicated for him in the *Sack of Troy*, an early epic in the Trojan cycle, in which Aineias and his followers were portrayed as withdrawing from Troy before its fall in response to a portent (see p. 484); and Aphrodite prophesies accordingly to Anchises in the Homeric hymn that his son and descendants will reign among the Trojans.⁴⁸

The old Spartan royal family

The early members of the family

The Spartan royal family was descended from TAYGETE, the daughter of Atlas, through LACEDAIMON, a son whom she bore to Zeus.⁴⁹ Lacedaimon was the eponym of the south-eastern province of the Peloponnese, which was known to the Greeks by that name (as was its main city too), although it is perhaps more familiar nowadays in a Latin form as Laconia. The alternative name of Sparta, which carried poetic and patriotic overtones, was also applied to the city and, in a looser sense, to the land as a whole. Taygete for her part was the eponym of Taygetos, the towering

mountain range that divided Lacedaimon from Messenia to the west. The only mythical tale recorded for her, in which she was said to have dedicated the Cerynitian hind to Artemis after the goddess saved her from being raped by Zeus (see p. 247), does not accord well with the tradition that makes her the founder of a royal line through a son born to Zeus.

LACEDAIMON married Sparta, a corresponding eponymous figure, who was a daughter of Eurotas, the eponym of the main river of the land, and a granddaughter (or great-granddaughter) of Lelex, the earth-born first ruler of the land. Lacedaimon and Sparta had a daughter Eurydice, who became the wife of Acrisios, king of Argos (see p. 225), and a son and successor **Amyclas**, who was the eponymous founder of Amyclai, an ancient town on the Eurotas about three miles south-east of Sparta. Amyclas was succeeded by his son **Cynortas** or Cynortes (either directly or after the death of an elder brother Argalos). It hardly needs saying that this is mythical history of a most elementary kind in which we encounter little more than a series of eponyms. Hyacinthos, the short-lived Laconian favourite of Apollo (see further on p. 149), who came to be classed as a son of Amyclas, is the only early member of the family to be of any real interest as a mythological figure. Having originated in pre-Hellenic cult rather than in heroic mythology, he was doubtless inserted into the royal line as a son of Amyclas because Amyclai was his most important cultic centre.⁵⁰

Cynortas was succeeded by his son **Oibalos**, another nonentity like himself, and it is only with the sons of Oibalos that we finally enter the realm of major heroic myth. Oibalos had three sons **Tyndareos**, his presumptive heir, and Hippocoon, and Icarios. HIPPOCOON, who was of illegitimate birth in some accounts, had a large family of twelve or twenty sons, and he seized the throne with their support after the death of Oibalos, driving Tyndareos into exile.⁵¹ In one version of the story, he expelled Icarios along with his brother, and they sought refuge in Aetolia with Thestios, king of Pleuron, and they repaid their host by assisting him in a border war, enabling him to extend his power into neighbouring Acarnania (where Icarios settled as a local ruler according to one tradition).⁵² Or else, Icarios helped Hippocoon to expel Tyndareos and remained with him in Sparta afterwards; in that case, Tyndareos stayed closer to home during the period of his exile, taking refuge at Pellana in Laconia, or with Aphareus, king of Messenia.⁵³ Hippocoon and his sons finally provoked their own downfall by incurring the enmity of Heracles, who mounted a campaign against Sparta and killed every one of them (see further on p. 264). The hero then invited Tyndareos back to take over the throne as the rightful king.

ICARIOS was otherwise remembered for having been the father of **PENELOPE**,⁵⁴ who became the wife of Odysseus, and it is no surprise to discover that his most interesting myths are connected with her and her marriage. In one account, Odysseus' father Laertes interceded with Icarios to help his son to win Penelope as a wife,⁵⁵ or in another, Tyndareos interceded on Odysseus' behalf in return for advice from him on how to avoid trouble from Helen's suitors (see further on p. 453); but a more picturesque legend suggested that Icarios arranged a bridal-race for Penelope's suitors in the streets of Sparta, hence the name of one such street Aphetais (Leaving-

Street), which was where the defeated suitors were left behind by the victorious Odysseus.⁵⁶ According to another local tale, which was put forwards to explain the origin of a statue of Aidos (Shame or Modesty personified) on the road north from Sparta, Icarios was distressed to think that his beloved daughter would be living far away from him on Ithaca, and tried to persuade Odysseus to settle down in Laconia; and when Odysseus proved unwilling, he begged Penelope to remain with him, even following after her in his chariot when she set off for Ithaca with her husband. Odysseus finally lost patience and told Penelope that she must either accompany him of her own free will or agree to return home with her father. Hesitating to speak aloud, she covered her face with her veil, and Icarios divined her meaning and allowed her to pass on her way, commemorating the incident afterwards by raising a statue to Aidos at the spot.⁵⁷

TYNDAREOS married LEDA, a daughter of his former host Thestios, king of Pleuron, and came to preside over a mixed family consisting partly of children whom by his wife bore to him as offspring of their marriage, and partly of children whom she bore to Zeus. In the case of **Helen**, who was certainly no more than a putative daughter of Tyndareos, there was even disagreement, as we will see, as to whether she was a daughter of Leda or merely an adoptive daughter whom Zeus had fathered by someone else. Leda otherwise bore three daughters to her husband, namely **Clytemnestra** (properly Clytaimnestra in Greek), who became the wife of Agamemnon, and **Timandra**, who married Echemos (an Arcadian king who was best remembered for having delayed the return of the Heraclids, see pp. 278–9), and **Phylonoe**, of whom nothing is recorded apart from the fact that Artemis rendered her immortal for some reason.⁵⁸

There was disagreement about the origin of **Castor** and **Pollux** (properly Polydeuces in Greek), the two sons of Leda. The *Odyssey* suggests that both were children of Zeus, while the Hesiodic *Catalogue* describes them on the contrary as sons of Tyndareos.⁵⁹ According to Pindar and the standard later tradition, however, they were of mixed paternity because Leda conceived Castor to Tyndareos and Pollux to Zeus, on the same night.⁶⁰ Throughout antiquity the twins were known nonetheless as the Dioscouroi (Sons of Zeus), or the Dioscuri to use the more familiar Latin form of their name.

Since Helen grew up to become the most beautiful woman in Greece, in accord with her semi-divine birth, she attracted suitors from all parts of the Greek world. In circumstances that will be described below, the Pelopid Menelaos won her as his wife, with the support of his brother Agamemnon, the rich and powerful king of Mycenae. Meneleas was already living in Sparta as a protégé of Tyndareos (for reasons explained on pp. 424–5), and he now settled down at the Spartan court with his wife. If it had not been for the early death of the Dioscuri, who were destined to be killed before the Trojan War, his prospects would have been limited, but he came to inherit the throne of his father-in-law as a result of that misfortune, and was one of the most powerful men in Greece when the war broke out. We will thus consider the life and death of the Dioscuri before returning to Helen's story.

The DioscURI, and their conflict with the sons of Aphareus

Inseparable from the time of their birth, the DIOSCURI grew up to become two of the greatest heroes in Greece during the period immediately preceding the Trojan War. CASTOR was particularly noted for his horsemanship and POLLUX for his prowess as a boxer.⁶¹ Along with most of the main heroes of their generation, they sailed with the Argonauts and joined the hunt for the Calydonian boar, and Pollux put his boxing skills to good use during the former adventure to kill the murderous pugilist Amycos (see p. 402).⁶² A reference to Pollux in a partially preserved poem by Alcman suggests that there was also an early tradition, in which the DioscURI helped Heracles in his campaign against Hippocoon (see p. 264).⁶³ As well as appearing in a supporting role in these joint adventures, the twins played a leading role in three legends of their own: they rescued the young Helen when she was abducted to Attica by Theseus (see p. 315), they abducted Hilaeira and Phoibe, two Messenian princesses, and they became embroiled in a fatal conflict with Idas and Lynceus, two Messenian princes, the two latter stories being interconnected in the later tradition at least.

Before considering the various traditions about the conflict between the two pairs of brothers, we must trace the previous history of the Messenian royal family into which Idas and Lynceus were born. They were of Deucalionid stock as grandsons of PERIERES, a son of Aiolos, who left his native Thessaly to settle in the fertile land of Messenia to the west of Laconia. Perieres established himself as its ruler and married Gorgophone ('Dragon-slayer'), a daughter of Perseus whose name commemorated her father's greatest feat. She bore him two sons, APHAREUS and LEUCIPPOS, who inherited the kingdom after his death, ostensibly as joint rulers although Aphareus held most of the power.⁶⁴ Leucippos had two daughters, HILAEIRA and PHOIBE, known jointly as the Leucippides, while Aphareus, who was married to Arene, daughter of Oibalos, king of Sparta, had two sons, IDAS and LYNCEUS, known jointly as the Apharetidai.⁶⁵ These sisters and brothers are the first members of the family to have any proper myths.

Idas and Lynceus usually acted in conjunction, like the DioscURI, although Idas performed one notable exploit of his own by abducting Marpessa from her native Aetolia and winning her as his wife in the face of opposition from Apollo (see pp. 147–8). The *Iliad* refers to this latter story, describing Idas as the mightiest of all men who were then on the earth.⁶⁶ Marpessa bore him a single child, Cleopatra, who became the wife of Meleager (see p. 387).⁶⁷ His brother Lynceus, who was noted for the exceptional and indeed magical keenness of his eyesight,⁶⁸ apparently never married. Like the DioscURI, they were naturally said to have taken part in the greatest adventures of their time, the voyage of the Argonauts and hunt for the Calydonian boar.⁶⁹

Although the DioscURI were commonly said to have earned the unremitting hostility of Idas and Lynceus by abducting Hilaeira and Phoibe, when their cousins were already betrothed to them, the quarrel arose for a wholly different reason, in what was probably the oldest version of the legend, namely as the result of a dispute over some cattle. Some such tale was recounted in the *Cypria*, but the surviving

sources for it offer little information on the matter, merely stating that a fight broke out when the Dioscuri were caught in the act while stealing the cattle from Idas and Lynceus.⁷⁰ Pindar reports similarly that Idas attacked Castor in anger over oxen, without offering any further detail.⁷¹ Apollodorus provides a full corresponding narrative, however, in which the early epic account may well be preserved. The two sets of brothers had joined together, so we are told, to rustle some cattle from Arcadia, and the trouble began when the spoils were entrusted to Idas for division. For he cut a cow into four, and proposed that half of the spoils should go to the one who ate his portion first, and the rest to the one who ate his portion second; and he hastily gulped down his own portion and that of his brother before anyone else had a chance. He then claimed all the cattle as a result of this ruse and drove them away to Messenia with the help of his brother. But the Dioscuri were unwilling to be deprived of their proper share through sharp practice of this kind and hurried off in pursuit; and on arriving in Messenia, they seized all the cattle that had been stolen from Arcadia along with many others, and set an ambush for Idas and Lynceus.⁷²

In the standard later tradition, by contrast, the Dioscuri provoked the conflict by abducting Hilaeira and Phoibe, when they were already betrothed to Idas and Lynceus. Although the surviving literary accounts of the abduction are all of quite late origin, the story was evidently current by the sixth century BC, since it was depicted in works of art from that period, including the Amyclaiian throne. The abduction may not always have had the same implications, however, because we cannot be sure that Idas (whose marriage to Marpessa is mentioned in the *Iliad*) and his brother, were originally thought to have been betrothed to the two maidens; but it came to be accepted that they had been, and it is even suggested in one account that the Dioscuri were invited to the marriage-feast and took advantage of the occasion to carry away the brides.⁷³ According to Theocritus, Lynceus accused the Dioscuri of having bribed Leucippos to give them his daughters by offering gifts of cattle and mules, even though they had been promised to their cousins.⁷⁴ Or, in a rather different version, the quarrel broke out because the Dioscuri failed to pay the proper bride-price for the two girls.⁷⁵

In the fight that followed, whether the dispute was over brides or over cattle, Castor and the two Messenian princes were usually thought to have been killed, while Pollux for his part was removed from the company of mortals. Beyond that, the different accounts vary considerably in their details. The end of the previously mentioned narrative by Apollodorus follows a similar course to the more detailed account of these ensuing events in Pindar's tenth Nemean Ode. When the Dioscuri tried to lay an ambush for the Apharetidai in Messenai, they were foiled, so Pindar tells us, by the extraordinary visual powers of Lynceus, who had keener eyesight than anyone on earth. For on climbing the height of Taygetos, the mountain range between Laconia and Messenia, to survey all the country that lay around, he observed that the twins were hiding inside a hollow oak tree, apparently using his magical vision to see through its trunk. This feature of the story is already recorded in some surviving verses from the *Cypria*, in which it is stated that Lynceus was able to survey the entire Peloponnese from his vantage point. Apollodorus merely says that he caught sight of Castor without any further details. Idas then rushed down to

the site with his brother and killed Castor, but the two brothers were then put to flight by Pollux, who pursued them to the burial place of their father Aphareus. Although they tried to push him back by uprooting their father's gravestone and hurling it at his chest, he pressed forwards nonetheless and killed Lynceus with a spear-thrust to the ribs; and Zeus then intervened on behalf of Pollux by striking Idas with a thunderbolt.⁷⁶

Pollux is regarded as a son of Zeus in this story, while Castor is a wholly mortal son of Tyndareos. According to Pindar, Pollux returned to his fallen brother to find that he was on the point of death, and prayed to Zeus to be allowed to die with him; but Zeus responded by offering him two choices, saying that he could either enjoy full immortality on Olympus in accordance with his divine parentage, or else share his immortality with his brother, so that each of them would spend half of their time in the Underworld and the other half with the gods on Olympus. Pollux chose the latter alternative without a moment's hesitation. Or, in Apollodorus' narrative, Zeus struck Idas with a thunderbolt after he had stunned Pollux by hurling a stone at him, and then carried Pollux up to heaven; but since Pollux was unwilling to accept immortality while Castor lay dead on the earth below, Zeus allowed him to share his immortality with his brother by arranging that both should live among the gods and among mortals (i.e. in the Underworld) on alternate days. These events took place not long before the Trojan War, or even only just before, for in the *Cypria* the Dioscuri entertained Paris when he first arrived in the Peloponnese, and became embroiled in this conflict with the Aphraetidae at the very time when Paris was putting his plan into effect in Sparta.⁷⁷

Some authors alter the preceding pattern by suggesting that Castor was killed by Lynceus rather than by Idas, or that Idas was killed by Pollux rather than by Zeus, but such variations make little practical difference.⁷⁸ Hyginus records an account, for instance, in which Lynceus was the first to die, at the hand of Castor, and Idas then put all other thoughts aside to attend to the burial of his brother, but this merely provided occasion for further confrontation, because Castor intervened to prevent him from raising a monument to his brother, saying that he had met with a most ignominious defeat. Idas was so angry that he fatally wounded him with a sword-thrust to the thigh (or else pushed the monument over to crush him beneath it), and when Pollux heard of Castor's fate, he rushed to the site, killed Idas in single combat, and prayed afterwards that he should be allowed to share his own immortality with his brother.⁷⁹

In the exceptional version offered by Theocritus, in which both of the Dioscuri survive the encounter, Castor proposed that he and Lynceus, as the younger brothers, should settle the matter by single combat so as to spare their fathers from suffering unnecessary distress. On losing some fingers in the fray, Lynceus dropped his sword and ran over towards his father's grave, from where his brother was watching the fight; but Castor rushed after him and transfixed him with his sword. And when Idas then seized the memorial-stone from his father's grave and was about to hurl it at Castor, Zeus struck him with a thunderbolt to save Castor, who thus survived as did his brother, who had been no more than a spectator.⁸⁰

It was inevitably suggested in astral mythology that the Dioscuri were raised to

the heavens to become the constellation of the Twins (Gemini), as a favour from Zeus because he wanted to commemorate their brotherly devotion.⁸¹ They were honoured as gods, particularly in their native Sparta, and became increasingly popular throughout the Greek world as protectors whose aid could be sought in times of danger, especially at sea. In the latter connection, they were sometimes identified with the Cabeiroi or gods of Samothrace (see p. 203). They manifested themselves in St Elmo's fire, an electrical discharge that plays around the masts of ships during thunderstorms; as the early lyric poet Alcaeus expresses the matter, they run up the mastheads shining bright from afar, bringing light to the black ship in the night of affliction.⁸² The cult of the Dioscuri was introduced to Rome at a relatively early period; according to Roman tradition, a temple was raised to them in the Forum in 484 BC in fulfilment of a vow that had been made by Aulus Postumius at the battle of Lake Regillus. It was claimed, indeed, that the Twins had appeared in person at the battle (c. 496), helping the Romans to victory against the Latins by leading them in a cavalry charge.⁸³ Castor overshadowed his brother for some reason at Rome, where the twins were quite often referred to as the Castores.

Nestor and his family at Pylos in Messenia

Just as the death of the Dioscuri changed the dynastic pattern in Sparta, by ensuring that Menelaos, a Pelopid, would inherit the throne rather than a member of the old Atlantid royal family, the death of Idas and Lynceus had a comparable effect in Messenia, by ensuring that NESTOR would be the most powerful ruler in that land by the time of the Trojan War.

Nestor's father NELEUS was one of the twin sons who were born to Poseidon by Tyro, daughter of Salmoneus (see p. 396); and since Salmoneus was a son of Aiolos like Perieres, the founder of the Messenian royal family, the families of Neleus and Perieres were related to one another as being of common Deucalionid descent (see pp. 379–80). When Neleus was expelled from Thessaly, the land of his birth, by his brother Peleus, the future king of Iolcos, (see p. 397), he sought refuge in Messenia with Aphareus, son of Perieres, who offered him a strip of land along the coast. Neleus built his palace at one of the towns that were located in it, sandy Pylos, which is familiar from the Homeric epics as Nestor's home city; and he married Chloris, a daughter of Amphion, king of Orchomenos, who bore him twelve mighty sons, including the shapeshifter Periclymenos and Nestor himself, who was the youngest of them.⁸⁴

Neleus brought disaster on himself and his family by offending Heracles, and so provoking the hero to mount an expedition against Pylos and kill him and all of his sons apart from Nestor, see further on p. 263. Nestor was too young to fight and was being brought up in Gerenia, another Messenian town. Having no quarrel with him, Heracles invited him back to Pylos and allowed him to take over his father's kingdom. When Idas and Lynceus met their death, not long before the Trojan War, Nestor became the heir to most of the other lands in Messenia, because the two brothers had been the only male descendants of Perieres in the second generation.⁸⁵ Accompanied by two of his sons, Antilochos and Thrasymachos, Nestor led the men

of Pylos and other Messenian cities to Troy, and returned home safely afterwards, although Antilochos was killed in the closing stages of the war while rescuing his father from Memnon, a foreign ally of the Trojans (see p. 476). The third book of the *Odyssey* describes how Nestor received Telemachos, the young son of Odysseus, at the Pylian court shortly after the war. If he is one of the best-known characters in the mythology of the Trojan War, this is largely because of the affectionate and yet humorous portrayal of him in the *Iliad*. Since he was much older than the other leaders, more than sixty years of age at the period covered in the *Iliad*, he was unable to achieve as much as he might have wished in the battlefield, but was highly valued nonetheless for his shrewd if sometimes erratic advice and his long-winded but engaging reminiscences.

The birth and early life of Helen, and her marriage to Menelaos

HELEN of Sparta and Troy was no ordinary woman but a daughter of Zeus whose beauty was tinged with more than a trace of the divine. Although she was reared by Leda at the Spartan court, there was disagreement as to whether Leda was her mother or merely her foster-mother; for in accordance with a tradition that went back to early epic, it was sometimes said that Zeus fathered her by the minor goddess Nemesis (Retribution personified, a daughter of Night, see p. 61) rather than by Leda herself. The tale that was offered to explain how Nemesis came to give birth to Helen, the only myth recorded for her, was recounted in the *Cypria*, the first epic in the Trojan cycle. A surviving fragment from that poem describes how she tried to escape the unwelcome advances of Zeus, fleeing over land and sea to escape his embrace, and then assuming all kinds of different forms when he continued to pursue her, turning now into a fish to speed through the waters of the sea, and then into all manner of dreadful beasts as she fled overland. Zeus is reported to have assumed the form of a goose in the next part of the narrative (presumably after Nemesis herself had adopted that form), and to have mated with her at last, causing her to conceive Helen, who was later born from an egg.⁸⁶ In some later accounts, Zeus or both partners mated in swan-form, and the mating is said to have taken place at Rhamnous, a coastal town in Attica, which was famous for its cult and temple of Nemesis.⁸⁷ The latter idea seems to have originated in a lost comedy, the *Nemesis*, by Cratinos, an Athenian author of the fifth century BC.

If Helen was conceived in this way, the only point that remained to be explained was how she came to be reared in Sparta by Leda, as a putative daughter of Tyndareos. Although it is not known how the matter was resolved in the *Cypria*, later sources offer two suggestions, saying either that the egg from which Helen was born was dropped into Leda's lap by Hermes (doubtless at the bidding of Zeus), or that it was brought to Leda by a shepherd who had discovered it in a grove in Attica.⁸⁸

The competing tradition that made Helen a true daughter of Leda was as old if not older, for Helen states in the *Iliad* that she and the Dioscuri shared the same mother (evidently Leda, who is always the mother of the Dioscuri and is named as such in the *Odyssey*).⁸⁹ Euripides' *Helen*, a play first produced in 412 BC, and works of art from the latter part of the fifth century, provide the earliest evidence for the

familiar account of Helen's origin, in which Zeus fathered her by mating with Leda in the form of a swan. Leda herself was naturally in her ordinary human form; for although the idea of Zeus's change of form was doubtless inspired by the legend of his bird-mating with Nemesis, it would hardly have been possible for Leda, as a mere mortal, to turn herself into a bird as Nemesis was supposed to have done. In Euripides' play, Zeus is said to have assumed the form of a bird to implement a seduction ruse. For he caused an eagle to pursue him through the air while he was in the form of a swan, and then sought refuge in Leda's lap, so as to win a sympathetic welcome from her (much as in the myth in which he was said to have seduced Hera by settling in her lap as a storm-tossed cuckoo, see p. 122).⁹⁰ Leda laid an egg as a result of this encounter, just as Nemesis was supposed to have done; it could be seen in later times in the temple of the Leucippides in Sparta, hanging from the roof on ribbons,⁹¹ and some claimed that the Dioscuri were born from the same egg or a similar one.⁹²

Irrespective of how Helen came to be born, she grew up as a Spartan princess at the court of her putative parents. Her childhood was brutally interrupted when Theseus and Peirithoos abducted her to Attica, while she was still below marriageable age, perhaps as young as eight or ten; but the Dioscuri rescued her while Theseus was away in the Underworld, and thus prevented him from being able to fulfil his plan of marrying when she came of age, see further on pp. 314–5. While recovering her, they captured Aithra, the mother of Theseus, who had been looking after Helen on her son's behalf while he was away. She was obliged to serve Helen as an attendant from that time onwards, first at Sparta and later at Troy. Since she is mentioned in that role in the *Iliad*, the story of Theseus' abduction of the young Helen must have been familiar by Homer's time, even if the poet makes no explicit mention of it.⁹³

When Helen reached maturity, most of the principal rulers and heroes of Greece sought to win her hand, including MENELAOS, son of Atreus, who had no kingdom of his own as yet, but had long enjoyed the favour of Tyndareos, and could also count on the support of his brother Agamemnon, the rich and powerful king of Mycenae. It should be remembered that Agamemnon himself and the great hero Achilles, who might otherwise have been formidable contenders, were not in a position to compete for Helen's hand because the former was already married to Clytemnestra, the half-sister of Helen, and the latter was too young. According to the early account in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, in so far as it is known from quite extensive fragments, the suitors conducted their courtship at a distance (initially at any rate) by sending heralds to Sparta with all kinds of valuable gifts. The Dioscuri seem to have played a central role both in dealing with the envoys and in determining the outcome. They finally chose in favour of Menelaos, even though they had been planning to award Helen to another suitor (whose name is not preserved) until Agamemnon intervened on his brother's behalf. Since Agamemnon was not only rich enough to offer precious gifts but was also a son-in-law of Tyndareos, it is understandable that his intervention should have proved decisive. The poet explicitly states that Menelaos was chosen because he offered the greatest gifts (evidently with the help of his brother). We are told that Odysseus knew in his heart that Menelaos

was bound to win because he was the richest in possessions and was forever sending messages to the Dioscuri.⁹⁴ In the standard later tradition, the suitors gathered at Sparta and the decision was made by Tyndareos;⁹⁵ or in another version, he allowed Helen herself to choose in accordance with her heart's desire.⁹⁶

According to a tradition that was already known to Stesichorus and the author of the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, Tyndareos feared that the rejected suitors might cause trouble when he revealed his choice, and he thus demanded that they should all swear beforehand that they would come to the aid of the chosen suitor if he should be threatened with violence or be robbed of his wife. In one account, this measure was suggested to him by the cunning Odysseus, who was aware of Tyndareos' worries and offered to provide a solution if the king would do him a favour in return, by helping him to win Penelope as his wife, Tyndareos being in a good position to assist him in that regard because Penelope was a daughter of his brother Icarios (see p. 447).⁹⁷ According to local tradition, the oaths were taken at a place known as the Horse's Grave (*Hippou Mnēmē*), which lay by the river Eurotas not far to the north of Sparta; for it was said that Tyndareos sacrificed a horse there, told the suitors to stand on pieces of its flesh as they swore their oaths, and then buried its remains at the spot.⁹⁸

These oaths would be of greater significance than Tyndareos could ever have imagined, because they would oblige many of the foremost heroes of Greece to fight on behalf of Menelaos at Troy after Helen was abducted by Paris. As this story of the oath-taking would imply, most of the Greek leaders at Troy were reckoned to have been among the suitors of Helen. Apollodorus and Hyginus provide catalogues of the suitors,⁹⁹ evidently based for the most part on the muster list in the second book of the *Iliad*. The following suitors are named in the surviving fragments of the Hesiodic *Catalogue*: Menelaos, the great Ajax, the two sons of Amphiaraios (i.e. Alcmaion and Amphilochos), Elephenor of Euboea, Idomoneus of Crete, Patroclos and Iphiclos from Thessaly, Thoas from Aetolia, and Odysseus. All of these are listed as Greek leaders in the *Iliad* except for the sons of Amphiaraios (one of whom, Alcmaion, died before the outbreak of the war). Since Apollodorus excludes Patroclos and Idomoneus from his list, it is unlikely that he based it on the *Catalogue*. The author of that poem tried as best he could to relate the manners of courtship of the individual suitors to their known characters and circumstances. Ajax, for instance, who possessed little of his own but was brave with his spear, promised to provide suitable bride-gifts and wondrous deeds too by robbing sheep and cattle from his neighbours.¹⁰⁰ Odysseus, on the other hand, had such a shrewd idea of his prospects that he spared himself the expense of sending any presents at all.¹⁰¹

After marrying Menelaos, Helen lived a luxurious and uneventful life at the Spartan court with her husband for some years, bearing him a daughter Hermione, who is described in the *Odyssey* as 'having the beauty of golden Aphrodite'.¹⁰² For Hermione's later history, see pp. 502 and 519. Although she is the only child of the marriage in the Homeric epics, some sources from the Hesiodic *Catalogue* onwards add another child, a shadowy figure called Nicostratos. Since Menelaos bequeathed his throne to his nephew Orestes (see p. 518), it came to be suggested that Menelaos fathered this son by a show-girl and that he was thus excluded from the

succession.¹⁰³ When the premature death of the Dioscuri deprived Tyndareos of his male heirs, he naturally adopted his son-in-law as his successor, and Menelaos succeeded to the throne after his death. By the time of the Trojan War, Pelopids thus were ruling in both Mycenae and Sparta. According to Apollodorus, Hermione was nine years old when Paris arrived in Sparta to abduct her mother and so provoke the outbreak of the war.¹⁰⁴

The origin of the Trojan War

Zeus lays plans for a great war

We can now pass on to the events that led up to the outbreak of the Trojan War. If Paris was directly responsible for provoking it through his abduction of the Greek princess Helen, he did not embark on that course as the result of an arbitrary decision of his own, but was induced to do so because the abduction formed part of a broader divine plan. Since Homer has nothing to say about this plan, except in one brief allusion, it will be necessary to rely on what can be gathered about how it was described in the *Cypria*, the first epic in the Trojan cycle. **Gaia** (Earth) was distressed by the weight of the many mortals who were swarming over her surface, who were not only all too numerous but impious besides; so she appealed to Zeus, who took pity on her and resolved to reduce their numbers, making an initial contribution to that end by provoking the Theban Wars. When he was then intending to cause even greater carnage by means of thunderbolts and floods, **Momos**, the personification of fault-finding (see p. 58), criticized his plans and proposed a subtler approach, suggesting that a destructive war should be provoked between Europe and Asia by indirect means. Zeus consulted accordingly with the wise prophetic goddess **Themis** to plan how this could be best achieved. The crucial first step would be to incite a quarrel between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, which would be referred to Paris for adjudication. So when Thetis married Peleus at a magnificent wedding attended by all the gods (see p. 430), **Eris**, the personification of Strife (see p. 61) appeared at the feast and provoked a furious quarrel between the three goddesses by throwing down an apple inscribed with the words, 'To the most beautiful'; and Zeus then instructed the divine messenger Hermes to conduct them to Mt Ida in the kingdom of Troy, to allow Paris to resolve the dispute.¹⁰⁵

In one of the sources for this story, it is reported that Momos offered suggestions of her own about the first two steps that would need to be taken, advising that Thetis should be married to a mortal and that Zeus should father a daughter of all-surpassing beauty (i.e. Helen);¹⁰⁶ but although the actions that Zeus took in these two respects were crucial to the unfolding of the plan, it is far from certain that he was presented in the *Cypria* as having brought about the marriage, or having fathered Helen for the specific purpose of advancing the plan. That poem is reported, indeed, to have offered a wholly different explanation for Zeus's action in forcing Thetis to marry Peleus (see p. 430).

There is only a single direct reference to the judgement of Paris in the *Iliad*, even

if a number of passages relating to Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena can be best interpreted in the light of that event; for after making it clear throughout the poem that Hera and Athena were exceptionally hostile to Troy, Homer offers some explanation for their attitude in the final book. The question arises in connection with Achilles' mistreatment of Hector's corpse (see p. 474). When the gods finally became so disgusted by Achilles' behaviour that they wanted to send Hermes to steal the corpse away from him, the plan finds favour with all the gods apart from Hera, Poseidon, and Athena, who persist in the hatred that they had long felt for Troy and for Priam and his people 'because of the blind folly (*atē*) of Alexandros (Paris), who had scorned the goddesses (i.e. Hera and Athena) when they had come to his steading, and gave his preference to the one who offered him grievous lust' (ἦ οἱ πόρε μαχλοσύνην ἀλεγεινὴν; obviously Aphrodite).¹⁰⁷ The allusion may be expressed in a rather obscure manner, but there is no reason to suppose that it refers to anything other than the familiar tale of the judgement of Paris, especially when it is remembered that Hera and Athena supported the Greeks throughout the *Iliad* while Aphrodite supported the Trojans and maintained a special association with Paris and Helen.

The judgement of Paris

The judgement of Paris is known to have been described in the introductory section of the *Cypria*, and probably at some length in view of the importance of the episode, but the surviving summary offers little detail, merely reporting that Paris judged in favour of Aphrodite because she won him over by promising Helen to him as a wife. We are not told whether the other two goddesses also offered inducements, as they almost certainly would have done. A fragment from the poem describes how Aphrodite prepared herself for the contest, by clothing herself in perfumed garments dyed with flowers of the spring, which had been made for her by the Charites and Horai (Graces and Seasons), and by weaving sweet-smelling garlands of flowers with the help of her attendants.¹⁰⁸

As the legend is usually recounted in tragedy and later sources, each of the goddesses offered a bribe to Paris, Hera promising him unshakeable royal power, Athena success in war, and Aphrodite irresistible physical allure or the loveliest of all women as a wife, these in each case being things that could be thought to lie within their gift in view of their own specific nature and concerns. In accordance with a familiar pattern in folklore, Paris was being asked to choose between the things that were most highly valued in popular estimation, and so make a choice between different forms of life, exposing himself to judgement in his turn through the decision that he reached. By deciding in favour of Aphrodite and what she represented, he earned the undying hatred of the other goddesses; and by then proceeding to abduct Helen with her help, he would incur the vengeance of Menelaos and the Greeks in general. As we have seen, Menelaos could call on the support of all the former suitors of Helen in such circumstances, and the Trojan War would therefore be set in train and the plan of Zeus fulfilled.¹⁰⁹

Paris sails to Greece to abduct Helen

Paris now prepared to sail off to Greece to win Helen as his wife. According to the *Cypria*, he arranged for some ships to be built for him at the suggestion of Aphrodite, who instructed her son Aineias to accompany him; and although two members of his own family, his brother Helenos and sister Cassandra, foretold what would happen if he proceeded with the plan, he sailed away nevertheless.¹¹⁰ It is stated in the *Iliad* that Phereclos, son of Tecton, a skilled craftsman favoured by Athena, built the ships for him, knowing nothing of what was decreed by the gods, to be a source of disaster for all of the Trojans and for himself.¹¹¹

A tradition that first appears in the fifth century BC suggests that Paris also received warnings from OINONE, a nymph whom he had married while he was still a herdsman on Mt Ida. Her predicament was particularly sad because she had known from the beginning that the love of Paris would bring her nothing but sorrow. When Paris had assured her of his love and had sworn that he would never abandon her, she had been able to tell him through her own prophetic powers (which she had acquired from the gods, or from Rhea specifically) that he would abandon her one day to abduct a woman from Europe. As he was about to set off for Greece, she told him that he would suffer a serious wound as a result of the conflict that would be provoked by his action, and that she alone would be able to cure him; and when he did indeed suffer a dangerous arrow-wound towards the end of the war (see p. 480), he remembered her words and sent a messenger to Mt Ida to summon her, but she had grown so embittered that she refused to come and said that he should turn to Helen instead. On seeing his dead body afterwards, however, she was filled with remorse and killed herself; or in a slightly different version, she changed her mind after her initial refusal and arrived with healing drugs, only to find that he had already died.¹¹²

When Paris arrived in Laconia, he was entertained initially by the Dioscuri (according to the *Cypria* at least, which places their death at the latest possible time), and then travelled inland to Sparta, where he received generous hospitality from Menelaos. After nine days had passed, Menelaos had to sail away to Crete to attend the funeral of Catreus, the former king of the island (who was his maternal grandfather, see p. 304), and he thus entrusted his guests to the care of Helen, telling her to provide them with whatever they might wish. Paris took advantage of his absence to pay court to Helen, an endeavour that proved none too difficult in view of his own physical attractions and the support that he received from Aphrodite. As soon as she was willing to elope with him, he set off with her by night, loading much of her husband's treasure on to his ship before they sailed.¹¹³ According to the *Cypria*, they consummated their union before leaving, while the *Iliad* states that they did so after their departure on an island of uncertain location called Cranae¹¹⁴ (Rocky Island, later identified with the isle of Helene off the southern tip of Attica, or with Cythera, or a small island off the Laconian coast near Gythion¹¹⁵). Presumably acting in her function as the protector of marriage, Hera sent storm-winds against the eloping couple, causing them to be carried to Sidon in Phoenicia. The *Iliad* alludes to their visit, mentioning that Paris bought some finely embroidered

robes there, and it would appear that the *Cypria* even presented him as having conquered the city. After a brief delay (or after waiting in the area for some time to avoid pursuit), Paris and Helen completed their voyage and arrived at Troy, where they formalized their union with due ceremony.¹¹⁶

Such was the usual story, but there was also another tradition, of quite early origin, that claimed that Helen never actually went to Troy. The idea on which this claim was founded can be traced back to Stesichorus, a poet of the sixth century BC, who recounted two versions of Helen's story, first offering the usual version, but then writing a *Palinode*, or poem of recantation, in which he provided a wholly different tale, apparently of his own invention, to vindicate Helen's honour. Legend claimed that she had struck him blind for insulting her in his first poem, and that he had then composed the recantation in order to regain his sight (see further on p. 574). According to the *Palinode*, of which very little has survived, Helen neither embarked with Paris on his ship nor arrived at Troy, but remained behind, while a phantom (*eidōlon*) of her accompanied Paris to Troy.¹¹⁷ It is not clear whether she remained behind in Sparta throughout the war, or was conveyed to Egypt by some god and remained there for the duration of the war (as seems more probable). That is what happens in the corresponding story recounted in Euripides' *Helen*, in which Hera is said to have created the phantom in her anger at having been passed over in the judgement of Paris. This phantom was abducted to Troy by Paris, while the true Helen was conveyed to Egypt by Hermes, and lived there at the royal court until the end of the war; and when Menelaos was shipwrecked in Egypt, while sailing home with the phantom Helen after the war, the phantom disappeared and the true Helen took her place. According to Euripides, Helen was in danger of being held back in Egypt because the original ruler, Proteus, had died during the time of the war and had been succeeded by his vicious son Theoclymenos, who wanted to force Helen to marry him, and killed every Greek who ventured into his realm; but Helen managed to deceive him with the help of his noble-minded sister, the priestess Theonoe. Euripides states similarly in the *Electra* that Zeus sent a phantom of Helen to Troy, while the true Helen stayed in Egypt with Proteus.¹¹⁸

Herodotus claimed to have heard from the priests of Egypt that Paris had been driven to Egypt by a gale after sailing off with Helen, and that Proteus had taken Helen and the stolen treasure away from him because he disapproved of his immoral behaviour. This is a rationalistic version without the phantom Helen; for we are told that the Greeks made war on Troy believing that Helen must be there, even though the Trojans assured them that she and the treasure had been detained in Egypt; and when it was discovered after the fall of Troy that there was indeed no sign of her in the city, the Greeks realized that the Trojans had been telling the truth, and Menelaos sailed off to Egypt to recover Helen from Proteus.¹¹⁹

Notes

¹ For the family of Atlas and Pleione, Hes. fr. 169, Hellenic. 4F19, Apollod. 3.10.1.

² *Hom. Hymn 4 to Hermes* 1–12, *Hom. Hymn 18 to Hermes* 1–9, Apollod. 3.10.2.

³ *Hom. Hymn 4 to Hermes* 3–4.

- 4 Hom. *Od.* 14.435.
- 5 Hellanic. 4F19b, Apollod. 3.10.1.
- 6 Hes. fr. 188A.
- 7 Hom. *Il.* 2.536–45.
- 8 Paus. 9.19.3, cf. 8.15.6, 9.17.2.
- 9 Hom. *Il.* 4.457–72.
- 10 Hellanic. 4F19a, Apollod. 3.10.1; Merope first named as his wife, Pher. 3F119 (her descent unstated).
- 11 Hellanic. 4F19a, Apollod. 3.10.1, Paus. 5.10.6.
- 12 Conon 21, Apollod. 3.12.1, cf. Hellanic. 4F23 (her children Dardanos, Eetion and Harmonia). Electra was apparently the mother of Dardanos and Eetion in the Hesiodic *Cataogues*, fr. 177, although the relevant papyrus is full of gaps.
- 13 Conon 21, Apollod. 3.12.1.
- 14 Lyc. 72–8 with schol. 73.
- 15 Hellanic. 4F24, D.S. 4.75.1, Apollod. 3.12.1.
- 16 Lyc. 1302–8 with scholia, Serv. *Aen.* 3.108; Apollo Smintheus, Hom. *Il.* 1.38–9.
- 17 Hom. *Il.* 20.215–20, Hes. fr. 177.13–15, Apollod. 3.12.1–2.
- 18 Hom. *Il.* 20.220–2.
- 19 Apollod. 3.12.2; cf Hom. *Il.* 20.230, D.S. 4.75.3, without name of wife.
- 20 Apollod. l.c.; cf Hom. *Il.* 20.231–2, D.S. l.c., without name of wife.
- 21 Hom. *Il.* 20.232–5.
- 22 Hom. *Hymn. Aphrodite* 202–17.
- 23 Schol. *Od.* 11.521.
- 24 Sent eagle, Eratosth. 30, Pliny *N.H.* 34.79, Apollod. 3.12.2; turned himself into eagle, Ov. *Met.* 10.155–6, Lucian *D.D.* 10.
- 25 Theognis 1345–8, Pi. *Ol.* 1.40–5, Pl. *Phdr.* 255c.
- 26 Hom. *Il.* 20.239–40, Apollod. 3.12.2, etc.
- 27 Apollod. 3.12.3.
- 28 Schol. Lyc. 29.
- 29 Apollod. 3.12.3.
- 30 Hom. *Il.* 11.371–2 etc.
- 31 Apollod. 3.12.3, cf. Hom. *Il.* 20.236.
- 32 Hom. *Il.* 7.452–3, 21.441–57, Apollod. 2.5.9.
- 33 On these events, see e.g. Apollod. 2.5.9 with 2.6.4; fuller references will be found under the full discussion in [Chapter 11](#).
- 34 Hom. *Il.* 6.242–50, 24.494–7.
- 35 Pi. *Paean* 8a, Apollod. 3.12.5, Hyg. *Fab.* 91 (serpents issue from firebrand), schol. Lyc. 86 (forests on Ida burned too).
- 36 Lyc. 138 with schol., Ael. *V.H.* 12.42, Apollod. 3.12.5 (for five days).
- 37 Lyc. 319–22 with schol. 319 schol. Lyc. 224 (Thymoites true father of child), Serv. *Aen.* 2.32.
- 38 E.g. Apollod. 3.12.5.
- 39 Hyg. *Fab.* 91.
- 40 Apollod. 3.12.2.
- 41 Thus Hom. *Hymn. Aphrodite* 45ff.
- 42 Ibid. 58–171.
- 43 Ibid. 172–290.
- 44 Soph. fr. 373 Radt, Hyg. *Fab.* 94 (boasted to companions over wine), Verg. *Aen.* 2.648–9 with Servius ad loc.
- 45 Hom. *Il.* 5.265–72.
- 46 Ibid. 13.465–6 with 428–31.
- 47 Ibid. 20.287–309.
- 48 Hom. *Hymn. Aphrodite* 196–8.
- 49 Apollod. 3.10.3, Paus. 3.1.2.
- 50 Apollod. 3.10.3, Paus. 3.1.1–4; almost nothing has survived from the relevant sections of the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, see fr. 129.10–12 (reference to Eurydice, daughter of Lacedaimon, who married Acrisios, cf. Apollod. l.c.), fr. 171 (very patchy, but apparently refers to Hyacinthos as a son of Amyclas).
- 51 Apollod. 3.10.4–5.
- 52 Ibid., Str. 10.2.24.
- 53 Paus. 3.1.4, schol. Eur. *Orest.* 457.

- 54 Apollod. 3.10.5–6, cf. Pher. 3F128, schol. *Od.* 4.797.
- 55 Pher. 3F129.
- 56 Paus. 3.12.1.
- 57 Paus. 3.20.10–11.
- 58 Apollod. 3.10.6–7, Hes. fr. 23a (three daughters of Tyndareos and Leda).
- 59 Hom. *Od.* 11.298–300 (cf. *Hom. Hymn.* 17 and 33.1–5), Hes. fr. 24.
- 60 Pi. *Nem.* 10.80–2, Apollod. 3.10.7.
- 61 Hom. *Il.* 3.237, *Od.* 11.300, Apollod. 3.11.2.
- 62 Boar-hunt, Apollod. 1.8.2, Ov. *Met.* 8.301–2; Argonauts, A.R. 1.146–50, Apollod. 1.9.16; Polydeuces kills Amycos, A.R. 2.1–97.
- 63 Alcman 1.1ff.
- 64 Apollod. 1.9.5, Paus. 4.2.2–4.
- 65 Paus. 4.2.4–5.
- 66 Ibid. 9.557–60.
- 67 Ibid. 9.553–7, Paus. 4.2.7; see also Apollod. 1.8.3 (hanged herself after Meleager's death).
- 68 Pi. *Nem.* 10.61–2, Apollod. 3.10.3, Paus. 4.2.7.
- 69 E.g. A.R. 1.151–5 (and *passim*) and Apollod. 1.8.2 respectively.
- 70 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 71 Pi. *Nem.* 60.
- 72 Apollod. 3.12.2.
- 73 Schol. *Il.* 3.243, schol. Pi. *Nem.* 10.112.
- 74 Theoc. 22.137–70.
- 75 Schol. *Lyc.* 547.
- 76 Pi. *Nem.* 10.55–90, Apollod. 3.11.2; cf. Proclus on *Cypria* with fr. 6 (Castor mortal) and 13 Davies (Lynceus sees Dioscuri hiding in oak).
- 77 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 78 E.g. Ov. *Fasti* 5.709–10, Hyg. *Fab.* 80 respectively.
- 79 Hyg. *Fab.* 80.
- 80 Theoc. 22.171ff.
- 81 Eratosth. 10, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.22.
- 82 Alcaeus 34.
- 83 Cic. *N.D.* 2.2.6, 3.5.11, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.
- 84 Hom. *Od.* 11.281–7, Hes. fr. 33a, Apollod. 1.9.9, Paus. 4.2.5, 4.36.1.
- 85 Paus. 4.3.1.
- 86 *Cypria* fr. 7 Davies (from Athen. 8.334b–d).
- 87 Eratosth. 25; shrine, Paus. 1.33.2.
- 88 Apollod. 3.10.7 and Hyg. *Astr.* 2.8 respectively.
- 89 Hom. *Il.* 3.236–8, *Od.* 11.298–300.
- 90 Eur. *Helen* 16–22; cf. Hyg. *Astr.* 2.8, Zeus adopts similar ruse to seduce Nemesis.
- 91 Paus. 3.16.1.
- 92 *Lyc.* 505–7, schol. *Od.* 11.298, Vat. *Myth.* 1.78, 1.204.
- 93 On all of this, see pp. 314–15 and notes.
- 94 Hes. fr. 196–204.
- 95 Apollod. 3.10.8–9.
- 96 Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 66–71, Hyg. *Fab.* 78.
- 97 Stes. 190, Hes. fr. 204.78–86, Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 51–65, Apollod. 3.10.9 (suggested by Odysseus).
- 98 Paus. 3.20.9.
- 99 Apollod. 3.10.8, Hyg. *Fab.* 81.
- 100 Hes. fr. 204.44–51.
- 101 Hes. fr. 198.4–6.
- 102 Hom. *Od.* 4.12–14.
- 103 Hes. fr. 175, Apollod. 3.11.1; Paus. 2.18.5 (Nicostratos illegitimate).
- 104 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.3.
- 105 Proclus on *Cypria* with fr. 1 Davies.
- 106 Schol. *Il.* 1.5–6.
- 107 Hom. *Il.* 24.25–30 (quotation 28–30).
- 108 Proclus on *Cypria*, *Cypria* fr. 5, 6 Davies.

- 109 Eur. *Troad.* 923–37, *Androm.* 274–92, *Iph. Aul.* 1283–1309, *Helen* 23–30; Isocr. *Helen* 41–4; Apollod. *Epit.* 3.2; Hyg. *Fab.* 92; Lucian *D.D.* 20.
- 110 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 111 Hom. *Il.* 5.59–68 (built Paris’s ships, 62–3), Apollod. *Epit.* 3.2.
- 112 Parthen. *Narrat.* 4 (= Hegesianax 45F2), Conon 23; Apollod. 3.12.6 (brings remedies but too late). On Paris and Oinone, see also Lyc. 57–68, Ov. *Heroides* 5, Q.S. 10.259–331 (refuses help when wounded), 411–89 (throws herself on to his funeral-pyre).
- 113 Proclus on *Cypria*, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.3.
- 114 Hom. *Il.* 3.443–5.
- 115 E.g. Str. 9.1.22, Eustath. Hom. 433.21, Paus. 3.22.1 respectively.
- 116 Proclus on *Cypria*, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.3–4, Hom. *Il.* 6.288–92.
- 117 Stes. 192; for legend of poet’s blinding and recantation, Pl. *Phdr.* 243a–b (with quotation from palinode), Isocr. *Helen* 64, Horace *Epode* 17.38–45; phantom Helen, Pl. *Rep.* 586c. See also p. 583 and note.
- 118 Eur. *Helen*, Eur. *Electra* 1280–2, cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 3.5.
- 119 Hdt. 2.112–20, with general discussion of question.

21

The Trojan War

The Greeks cross over the sea and lay siege to Troy

Menelaos assembles a Greek force after the abduction of Helen

When Paris abducted Helen, the wife of Menelaos, king of Sparta, Menelaos was away in Crete attending the funeral of Catreus, the former king of the island. The news of her abduction was brought to him by Iris, the goddess of the rainbow who often acted as a divine messenger (see p. 51), and he immediately hurried back to Greece to consult with his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, about raising an army to recover her from Troy.¹ He then travelled to the west coast of the Peloponnese to see Nestor, king of Pylos, a man of wide experience who was older than most the Greek rulers who became involved in the war, and was thus particularly valued for his advice; and the two of them travelled together throughout Greece (possibly accompanied by Agamemnon) to recruit to the foremost men of the land for the expedition, who subsequently assembled with their followers at Aulis, a town on the east coast of Boeotia, to prepare for the voyage across the Aegean. Such was the way in which the events that immediately led up to the launching of the expedition were described in the *Cypria*, the first epic in the Trojan cycle, which narrated the history of the war up until the period that is covered in the *Iliad*.²

In the subsequent tradition at least, all the suitors of Helen were said to have sworn an oath that committed them to come to the aid of her chosen husband if he should suffer any injury with regard to his marriage (see p. 453), and most of the leading men of the time were thus obliged to fight in support of Menelaos. According to Apollodorus, Agamemnon simply sent a herald to each of the Greek rulers to remind them of their obligations as former suitors of Helen.³ Others agreed to take part of their own free will, including Achilles, who figures in one of the two specific stories recorded in connection with the assembling of the troops. As recounted above, his mother Thetis had hidden him away on the island of Scyros, where he was living at the king's court in female disguise, but he was only too eager to take part when he was sought out and identified by means of a ruse (see p. 432). In the other such story, already recounted in the *Cypria*, Odysseus resorted to a ruse on his own part, by feigning madness to try to avoid having to serve, but he had to respond to the summons after the ruse was exposed, see further on p. 471.

As already mentioned, Menelaos and Agamemnon became the leaders of the expedition because Menelaos was the aggrieved party as the husband of Helen, while Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, was not only his brother but was also able to offer him the greatest support as the richest and most powerful of the Greek rulers. In the Homeric epics and later tradition alike, Agamemnon is presented as owing his prestige more to his high position as king of Mycenae than to any outstanding merits of his own, even though he is brave and effective as a warrior. He lacks a sure touch in dealing with his fellow-leaders, who, it should be remembered, were not formally obliged to obey his orders, for he tends to act in an abrupt and high-handed manner and yet lacks the force of character to provide a proper lead in the face of misfortune, tending to fall into despondency when the army is confronted with any serious reverse. Menelaos is somewhat eclipsed by his more eminent brother and is a man of less distinctive character in Homer's portrayal at least. Although a fine warrior, he could be said to be of the very first rank in that regard, only being outclassed by Achilles, Ajax, Agamemnon, and Diomedes. He is a noble figure nonetheless in the early tradition, and hostile portrayals of him in Attic tragedy, which are coloured by anti-Spartan sentiment, should not be taken as representative. Something has already been said about the characteristics and earlier life of Achilles and Ajax, the most formidable warriors on the Greek side, see pp. 431ff., and also about Diomedes, a leading hero of less distinctive character, see p. 368. A comprehensive and very ancient catalogue of all the leaders, which provides valuable information about their places of origin and relative power, may be found in the second book of the *Iliad* (lines 494–759).

When the Greek leaders and their followers gathered together at Aulis, they witnessed a disconcerting portent, which was interpreted for them by the seer Calchas. It is known that the *Cypria* offered an account of this episode, and the portent is described in some detail in the *Iliad*. While a large sacrifice was being offered to the gods at some altars that were set around a spring below a plane tree, a fearsome snake with a blood-red back slid from beneath one of the altars and climbed into the tree, which held a nest containing eight sparrow chicks. The snake devoured the chicks, and also the mother bird as she fluttered around in response to their cries, but it was then turned to stone by Zeus. Calchas revealed that this was a sign from Zeus, indicating that the Greeks would spend nine years fighting at Troy until the city finally fell to them in the tenth year.⁴

The Greeks sail across the Aegean, calling in at Delos, and attack Mysia in the belief that it is Troy

While sailing across the sea towards Troy, the Greeks called in at the holy island of Delos, which was then under the rule of ANIOS, a seer and priest of Apollo. He had three daughters, OINO, SPERMO, and ELAIS, known collectively as the OINOTROPHOI (Wine-growers), who could produce wine (*oinos*), grain (*sperma* meaning a seed), and olive oil (*elaion*) at will, either by drawing them from the ground or by turning things into them through their touch.⁵ It was said that they had acquired these powers from Dionysos.⁶ According to an ancient story that was

recounted by Pherecydes and probably also in the *Cypria*, Anios vainly attempted to persuade the Greeks to remain with him for nine years, promising that his daughters would provide them with all the provisions that they required, for he was aware that Troy was fated to remain unconquered for that period of time.⁷ Although the Greeks preferred to continue on their way, it is reported in some later sources that the daughters of Anios did in fact come to their aid when they ran short of provisions during the long siege of Troy. In that case, Agamemnon sent Menelaos to fetch the girls, or else, in a version ascribed to Simonides, Menelaos and Odysseus sailed to Delos with many followers for that purpose.⁸ The latter story is cited by an ancient scholiast to explain a line in the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus is said to have visited Delos during the war. This need not conflict, of course, with the story in which the Greeks initially rejected their services. In a wholly different version of the legend recorded in some late Latin sources, the daughters of Anios visited the Greeks at Aulis to provide them with supplies before they even set sail.⁹

Anios had come to be born on Delos in the following circumstances. After his mother Rhoio (Pomegranate-woman) was seduced by Apollo in her homeland on the Carian coast of Asia Minor, her father Staphylos (Grape-cluster-man), a son of Dionysos, refused to believe that a god was responsible for her resulting pregnancy, and locked her up in a chest and set it adrift in the sea (a motif familiar from the famous myth of Danae and Perseus, see p. 225). The chest was washed ashore on Delos, however, an island sacred to Apollo, where Rhoio gave birth to her child. She placed him on an altar of Apollo, praying to the god to save him if he acknowledged him as his son, and Anios was duly reared and befriended by his divine father, who instructed him in the arts of divination.¹⁰ It was said that his mother named him Anios because of all the distress (*ania*) that she had suffered because of him.¹¹ His wondrous daughters were borne to him by a certain Dorippe. According to Vergil, and to Ovid too, who offers a singular version of the story of his daughters, Aineias and his followers received a friendly welcome from him when they called in at Delos on their way to Italy.¹²

The Greeks sailed on from Delos to the coast of Asia Minor but when they arrived there they were so ignorant of the geography of the area that they landed in Mysia, the territory adjoining the Troad to the south, and attacked it in the belief that it was Troy. Mysia was under the rule of TELEPHOS, a son whom Heracles had fathered by the Arcadian princess Auge (see p. 550 for the stories that were put forward to explain how he came to be established in this Asian kingdom). On discovering that his land was under attack, Telephos hastily gathered some men together and pursued the Greeks back to their ships, killing many of them, including Thersandros, son of Polyneices, the leader of the Boeotian contingent (see p. 363); but Achilles demonstrated his prowess for the first time by putting him to flight, and wounded him in the thigh with his spear when he became entangled in some vines. Some said that Dionysos provoked this mishap because Telephos had failed to pay him due honour.¹³

Having no quarrel with the Mysians, the Greeks re-embarked and sailed off in search of Troy, but the fleet was soon struck by a violent storm that scattered the ships, and they thus made their way back to their various homelands as best they

could. Since ten years would pass before they would make their second crossing, this false start meant that Troy would not fall until twenty years after they had first assembled, allowing for the ten years that the siege was fated to last.¹⁴ This idea of the long delay was certainly of early origin, since it appeared in the *Cypria*, and may already have been known to Homer, for Helen remarks in the *Iliad* at one point that it is twenty years since she left home.¹⁵ According to the *Cypria*, Achilles called in at Scyros after sailing back from Mysia, and married Deidameia, the mother of his son Neoptolemos, who would thus have been conceived at this time rather than before the outbreak of the war as in the later tradition (see p. 432).¹⁶

During the period between the two sailings, Telephos became increasingly concerned about the state of his wound, which stubbornly refused to heal, and he thus eventually decided to travel to Greece to consult the Delphic oracle. On being advised that the inflictor of the wound should become its healer, he set off to find Achilles, who was now in Argos, where the Greek forces had assembled before proceeding to Aulis for the second time. When Telephos appealed to Achilles to help him promising to repay the favour by guiding the Greeks to Troy, Achilles cured him by scraping some rust from his spear into some water and applying it to his wound. An immediate result was thus achieved by a form of sympathetic magic, as in the story of Iphiclos (see p. 223). Although the manner of the cure is first attested in sources from the Roman period, this was probably an ancient feature of the legend.¹⁷

This story of the sufferings and cure of Telephos appealed to authors of tragedy, as can be seen from the fact that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides all wrote plays about the matter, which have unfortunately not survived. In a famous scene from Euripides' *Telephos*, which was mocked by Aristophanes, Telephos appeared among the Greeks in disguise, dressed in rags like a beggar.¹⁸ Hyginus provides an account, evidently based on one or more tragedies, in which Telephos seized Agamemnon's infant son Orestes from his cot and threatened to kill the child if the Greeks refused to grant him a cure. Having received an oracle telling them that they would be able to conquer Troy only on condition that they took him as a guide, they were willing to come to terms with him and asked Achilles to cure him. When Achilles protested that he knew nothing about medicine, Odysseus explained that the oracle had not been referring to Achilles himself when it spoke of the 'inflictor' of the wound, but rather to the spear that had actually caused the wound. So Achilles proceeded to cure him in the way that has already been described.¹⁹ When the Greeks then invited him to join them as an ally in the forthcoming war, he declined to do so because he was married to one of Priam's daughters, but he guided them to Troy as repayment for the cure and then returned home to Mysia.²⁰

The Greeks make a successful crossing after the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, attack Tenedos, and abandon Philoctetes

As the Greek force was preparing to sail from Aulis for a second time, the fleet was detained in port as the result of an act of impiety committed by Agamemnon. According to the *Cypria*, he shot a stag while hunting in the area and was then

foolish enough to boast that he was a finer hunter than Artemis herself. When the goddess punished his presumption by sending adverse winds (or imposing a dead calm) to prevent the fleet from sailing, the seer Calchas revealed that Agamemnon was to blame, and that to allay the anger of Artemis, it was necessary that his daughter IPHIGENEIA should be offered in sacrifice to her. So Iphigeneia was summoned from Mycenae on the pretence that she was to be married to Achilles, and she was brought to sacrifice on her arrival. Artemis snatched her way at the last moment, however, substituting a stag for her on the altar, and transferred her to the land of the Taurians (i.e. the Crimea) to become a goddess (see [Figure 21.1](#)).²¹ Such was the account offered in the *Cypria*, but there was some disagreement in the later tradition about the fate of Iphigeneia, for some said that she was indeed killed when she was brought to the altar, while Euripides put forward a distinctive account in his *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, in which Artemis was said to have transferred Iphigeneia to the land of the Taurians to serve as her priestess (see further on p. 517).²²



[Figure 21.1](#). Iphigeneia is replaced at the altar by a deer. Apulian red-figure volute krater. © The

Although the early epic account of the cause of Artemis' anger remained the standard one, alternative versions came to be developed with regard to this matter too. In the afore-mentioned play by Euripides, for instance, Artemis demanded the sacrifice as reparation for a broken vow; for many years before, Agamemnon had vowed to offer her the finest thing born in that year, but had failed to sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia to her when she came to be born in that year.²³ Or, in another version, the offence dated back to the previous generation, when Agamemnon's father Atreus had vowed to offer the goddess the finest lamb born in his flocks, but had failed to sacrifice a golden-fleeced lamb (see p. 422) when it had come to be born.²⁴ Or else it was Menelaos who provoked the anger of the goddess, by shooting a deer that was sacred to her.²⁵

Agamemnon was certainly placed in a terrible predicament by the goddess's demand and it is understandable that this should have been an attractive subject for authors of tragedies; but although Aeschylus and Sophocles also wrote plays on the matter, Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* is the only one that has survived. In that play, Achilles tries to save Iphigeneia after discovering that she has been summoned to Aulis on the pretence of being married to him, but the situation is finally resolved by Iphigeneia herself, who volunteers to be sacrificed for the common good. Some said Agamemnon's sacrifice of her aroused such anger in his wife Clytemnestra that this was the main reason why she killed him after his return (see p. 513).²⁶

After Artemis had been appeased in this way, the fleet was finally able to set sail, and it made a safe passage across the Aegean. It called in first at the island of Tenedos just off the coast of the Troad. TENES (or Tennes), the king of the island, had become embittered and hostile to strangers as a result of his unhappy earlier history. His father, Cynos, son of Poseidon, who ruled at Colonai in the Troad, had fathered him by his first wife Procleia, a daughter of Laomedon, king of Troy, but had remarried after death taking Philonome, daughter of Tragasos, as his second wife. Philonome conceived a passion for her stepson and made advances to him, but she was overcome by rancour when she found herself rejected, and exacted revenge on him by telling her husband that he had tried to seduce her. Cynos believed her and became even more convinced when she persuaded a flautist, Eumolpos, to bear false witness to her claim. So Cynos locked Tenes into a chest along with his sister Hemitheia, who had spoken in support of him, and launched it into the sea. After it was washed ashore on Tenedos (then known as Leucophrys), the islanders invited him to become their ruler, and he accepted the offer, renaming the island after himself. When Cynos eventually discovered that his wife had deceived him, he exacted a pitiless revenge by burying her alive and stoning Eumolpos to death. He then sailed off to Tenedos to seek his son's forgiveness; but when he moored his ship and tried to speak, Tenes was too embittered even to listen and severed his mooring-ropes with an axe.²⁷

When Tenes saw the Greeks sailing towards his island, he reacted in his customary manner and tried to keep them away by pelting them with stones. They came ashore nonetheless, and Achilles killed Tenes in the course of the fighting with

a sword-thrust to his chest.²⁸ Or, in a version that is less creditable to the Greek hero, Achilles killed Tenes when he intervened to prevent him from raping his sister Hemitheia.²⁹ There was a tradition that Apollo was the true father of Tenes, and that Achilles had been warned beforehand by his mother, Thetis, that he should not kill him (or any son of Apollo) because he was fated to meet an early death at the hand of that god if he did (as would later come to pass, see p. 477). It was sometimes said, indeed, that Thetis had arranged that a servant called MNEMON (Unforgetting) should accompany him to keep him ever mindful of this danger, but that Mnemon failed to warn him about Tenes, and Achilles was so angry to learn of his negligence that he drove a spear through Mnemon's chest.³⁰

While the Greeks were feasting on Tenedos, one of their leading warriors, PHILOCTETES, was bitten by a snake, and because the wound festered and caused an unbearable stench, his comrades subsequently abandoned him on the island of Lemnos, some thirty miles to the west.³¹ Such was the account offered in the *Cypria* of the other major incident of the crossing, the marooning of Philoctetes, son of Poias, a great archer from Malis in southern Thessaly who was the current owner of the bow of Heracles (see p. 269). Sophocles offers a rather different account of the initial episode in his *Philoctetes*, indicating that the hero was bitten at a place called Chryse by a snake that was guarding the roofless shrine of the goddess of the same name.³² Euripides apparently said much the same in the prologue of his lost play of the same name, stating that Philoctetes was bitten as he was guiding his comrades to the altar of Chryse to offer a sacrifice.³³ The place in question should doubtless be distinguished from the Chryse that is mentioned in the *Iliad* as the home of the priest Chryses; Pausanias reports that it was an island – evidently a very small one – that lay close to Lemnos until it was submerged beneath the sea (presumably as the result of a seismic disturbance).³⁴ Some later sources suggest that Philoctetes suffered his wound at a shrine of Chryse on Lemnos itself.³⁵ In Hyginus' version, Hera is said to have sent the snake against him on Lemnos because she was angry with him for having helped Heracles by kindling his funeral-pyre;³⁶ or according to another suggestion, Chryse was an amorous nymph who incited the snake to bite Philoctetes when he spurned her advances.³⁷ Whatever the exact circumstances of the wounding, his comrades were so disturbed by the smell of his festering wound, and perhaps also by his ill-omened cries of pain, that they left him behind on Lemnos, which is presented as an uninhabited island in this context (although that conflicts with other aspects of its mythology, particularly with regard the visit made by the Argonauts, see p. 400). By shooting wild birds with his bow, he survived in isolation on the island for almost ten years, until he was finally rescued and brought to Troy, where he was healed at long last by a son of Asclepius (see p. 480).³⁸

In a wholly different account of the wounding of Philoctetes from late Latin sources, Heracles had made him swear never to reveal the resting place of his mortal remains, and he had given him his poisoned arrows by way of a reward. After learning from an oracle that they would need the arrows during the Trojan War, the other Greeks later questioned Philoctetes about Heracles; and when he finally told them that Heracles was dead, they insisted that he should show them where the hero was buried. Wanting to preserve his oath in a formal sense at least, he said nothing

but indicated the hero's burial place with a stamp of his foot. He paid for his transgression nonetheless, for one of the poisoned arrows fell from his quiver during the journey to Troy and inflicted an apparently incurable wound on his foot. So his comrades abandoned him as in the usual story, after first seizing the remaining arrows.³⁹

The Greek landing at Troy and death of Protesilaos

On seeing the invasion force sailing in from the sea, the Trojans attempted to prevent the Greeks from landing by pelting their ships with stones. The first Greek warrior to leap ashore was PROTESILAOS, son of Iphiclos, who commanded the men from Phylace and the neighbouring cities of southern Thessaly. The main features of his story are already noted in the *Iliad*, which mentions that he was killed by a Dardanian warrior as soon as he landed, leaving a grieving wife in Phylace and a half-completed house (for he was newly married). Subsequent sources from the *Cypria* onwards identify his killer as Hector, doubtless because it seemed appropriate that the first assailant should be killed by the greatest of the defending warriors. According to a tradition that is first reported by Apollodorus (but may well have been quite ancient), the first man ashore was fated to be the first to die, and Achilles held back because he had been warned of this by Thetis.⁴⁰ Or else this was commonly known, and Protesilaos showed exceptional courage by leaping ashore when everyone else was holding back.⁴¹

The unfortunate young wife of Protesilaos was LAODAMEIA, a daughter of Acastos, king of Iolcos (except in the *Cypria*, in which she was named as Polydore, daughter of Meleager).⁴² The earliest record of her legend is contained in what we can piece together of the lost *Protesilaos* of Euripides. In that tragedy, Protesilaos was said to have left for the war after he had been married to Laodameia for only a single day; and after his death, he prayed to the gods of the Underworld to be allowed to return to her for an additional day. His wish was granted, but Laodameia apparently took her own life when he had to depart.⁴³ In another account, the dead Protesilaos was brought to her after she herself had prayed to the gods to be allowed to meet him for three hours, but she died of a broken heart after Hermes took him away again.⁴⁴ Or else she made a bronze image of him to console herself after he was taken back to Hades; and when a servant happened to see her embracing the statue while peeping through a crack in the door, he supposed that she had a lover and informed her father Acastos. On bursting into the room, however, he saw that it was merely a statue, and tried to relieve her of her torment by having it burned. But this only served to increase her distress, and she jumped on to the pyre with it and was burned to death.⁴⁵ In yet another account, she fashioned such an image and consorted with it as though it were her husband, arousing the pity of the gods, who arranged for Hermes to bring Protesilaos up from Hades for a reunion. Supposing that he had returned safely against all expectation, she was overjoyed to see him, and was so distressed when he was taken away again that she took her own life.⁴⁶

IPHICLOS, the father of Protesilaos, was famous for the extraordinary speed with which he could run, for it was said that he could outpace the wind and run so swiftly

over standing corn that the ears had no time to break, and so swiftly over the sea that he never sank beneath the surface of the water.⁴⁷ This was mentioned in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, and he was certainly marked out by his speed from the earliest tradition because Homer refers to him as a swift runner whom Nestor was proud to have beaten in a foot-race.⁴⁸ His younger son PODARCES (Swift-foot), whose name commemorates this distinguishing characteristic of his, succeeded Protesilaos as commander of the men from their native land. In the later tradition at least, he was said to have fallen victim to the Amazon Penthesileia in the last stages of the war.⁴⁹ This family was descended from Deion, son of Aiolos, whose son PHYLACOS was the eponymous founder of Phylace, which ranked in mythical history with Achilles' home city of Phthia as one of the two main cities of Phthiotis, the south-eastern region of Thessaly.⁵⁰ Phylacos was the father of Iphiclos and of Jason's mother Alcimede.⁵¹ Iphiclos appears in only a single myth, which tells how the seer Melampous delivered him from the impotence that his father had unwittingly induced in him, see p. 223.

To return to the story of the Greek landing, Achilles jumped ashore at the head of his Thessalian followers, the Myrmidons, after the death of Protesilaos and confronted CYCNOS, son of Poseidon, the most formidable of the many warriors who were opposing the Greek landing. It is quite possible that this Cynos may be identified with the Cynos who was the father of Tenes (see p. 464), although this is never stated. He was especially dangerous because his divine father had rendered him invulnerable (in the strict sense, i.e. immune to piercing wounds); his name means 'Swan' in Greek, and it would seem that he was suitably pale or perhaps an albino, since the Hesiodic *Catalogue* refers to his 'white head' and Hellanicus stated that he was white-skinned from birth.⁵² Another tale suggests that he was tended by swans as an infant.⁵³ Although the *Cypria* is known to have recounted the story of his death, a passing allusion by Aristotle provides the earliest evidence for his invulnerability (unless this can already be inferred from a fragment of Sophocles' *Poimenes*).⁵⁴ Pindar mentions that Achilles killed him without offering any details. Apollodorus reports, perhaps in accordance with an early tradition, that Achilles caused his death by hurling a stone at his head.⁵⁵ Or, in Ovid's fuller narrative, Achilles lost his temper after finding that his spear and sword made no impression on the body of Cynos, and battered the face of the invulnerable hero with the hilt of his sword. As Cynos was retreating from this onslaught, his withdrawal was blocked by a large boulder, and Achilles took advantage of this to dash him to the ground. Achilles then kneeled down on him, crushing his ribs with his shield, and killed him at last by throttling him with the leather strap of his helmet. Ovid concludes by saying that Cynos was turned into a swan by his father Poseidon, but this was doubtless a Hellenistic innovation (if not a detail invented by Ovid himself).⁵⁶

The Trojans were so dismayed by the death of Cynos that they retreated towards the safety of their city, and all the remaining Greeks now jumped out of their ships and pursued the fleeing enemy across the plain, covering it with dead bodies. As a result of these events, the invaders established a firm grounding on the plain and penned the Trojans behind their city walls. The long siege commenced.⁵⁷

The first nine years of the conflict

Some noble families at Troy, and the failure of the Greek embassy

Herodotus was inclined to accept the idea that Helen had been in Egypt during the war, as some authors proposed (see p. 497), because he was unable to believe that the Trojans would have refused to surrender her if that had been within their power, irrespective of the wishes of Paris; but that would have spoiled the story, and there is no suggestion in the mythical tradition that any pressure was ever exerted on Paris to appease the Greeks by handing her over. In a memorable scene in the *Iliad*, the Trojan elders see Helen walking towards them while they are sitting together on the ramparts one day, and remark that it is no shame (*ou nemesis*) that the Trojans and Greeks should have suffered such woes for such a woman, who looks wondrously like an immortal goddess; and if they add nonetheless that they wish that she would go away and cease to be a curse to them and their children, this is merely a wish rather than the expression of any active desire.⁵⁸

The matter was settled once and for all, for good or ill, when the Greeks sent some envoys shortly after they landed (or else rather earlier while the fleet was still at Tenedos) to try to negotiate the return of Helen. The delegation was headed by Menelaos and Odysseus, who declared that there would be no need for a war if Helen were surrendered along with the treasures that had been stolen by Paris.

In so far as it is possible to talk of a ‘peace party’ and ‘war party’ at Troy, these were headed by Antenor and Antimachos respectively, the senior members of two noble families at Troy. The two Greek ambassadors received hospitality from ANTENOR, a wise elder who was married to THEANO, the Trojan priestess of Athena, who entertained the two Greek ambassadors in his house, and they then addressed the assembled Trojans; but their appeal was rejected, and they even fell into some danger because ANTIMACHOS, who had received a handsome gift of gold from Paris, not only spoke against them but urged that they should be put to death on the spot. Such is the story recorded in the *Iliad*, which also reports that Antenor argued on a later occasion that Helen and the treasures should be surrendered, because no good could come from continuing to fight for a dishonourable cause; we should doubtless suppose that he had already expressed such thoughts at the time of the embassy, and it is indeed stated in the subsequent literature that he saved the two ambassadors from being killed.⁵⁹ The ignoble behaviour of Antimachos brought nothing but pain to him in the end, because Agamemnon inflicted a brutal death on his two sons, Peisandros and Hippolochos, on encountering them on the battlefield, rejecting any thought of a ransom in view of the conduct of their father.⁶⁰ The Greeks were so impressed by Antenor’s behaviour, on the other hand, that they hung a panther-skin on the door of his house during the sack of Troy to indicate that his family and possessions were not to be touched. That was probably a fairly ancient feature of the story, since the skin was shown in Polygnotos’ painting of the sack of Troy, made in the fifth century BC.⁶¹ If he was motivated by considerations of justice in the epic and classical tradition, there are also revisionist accounts of much later origin that present him as a traitor who conspired with the Greeks for purely selfish

reasons, and even suggest that he and his wife betrayed the city to them by opening the city gates and the trap-door of the Wooden Horse, or by enabling them to gain possession of the Palladion (a talisman that protected the city, see p. 443).⁶²

Antenor had a number of sons, most notably AGENOR, who has his moment of glory in the *Iliad* when he alone dares to make a stand against Achilles at the height of his advance, while all the other Trojans are fleeing to the safety of the city walls. Agenor strikes first with a throw of his spear, but to no effect because it bounces off Achilles' leg-armour, and he would doubtless have been killed in the Greek hero's counter-attack if Apollo had not wrapped him in a cloud of mist and spirited him away; Apollo then assumes his guise to lure Achilles away while the rest of the Trojans are making their escape, leaving Hector alone to confront him.⁶³ Agenor was finally killed by Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles, during the sack of the city.⁶⁴

Apart from the families of Antenor and Antimachos, only one other noble family, that of the Panthoids, was of any real significance. Its senior member PANTHOOS, who is mentioned as one of the Trojan elders who met on the ramparts, had three sons, Polydamas (or Poulydamas in epic parlance), Euphorbos, and Hyperenor. POLYDAMAS was born on the same night as Hector, and he was as renowned for his wisdom as Hector was for his martial prowess.⁶⁵ He offers shrewd advice to Hector on four occasions in the *Iliad*, but Hector is not always patient enough to accept it. EUPHORBOS, the other main son of Panthoos, inflicts the first wound on Achilles' friend Patroclus before Hector delivers the death-blow, but he is killed soon afterwards by Menelaos while trying to avenge the death of his brother Hyperenor.⁶⁶ The shield that Menelaos had supposedly taken from Euphorbos on that occasion could be seen at the temple of Hera at Mycenae, or at Branchidai in Asia Minor according to another claim.⁶⁷ The sage Pythagoras, who believed in the transmigration of the soul, claimed to have been Euphorbos in one of his previous lives, and was said to have authenticated the claim by identifying the shield of Euphorbos in the temple of Apollo at Branchidai.⁶⁸

Even if members of these noble families made some contribution, the many sons of Priam were most prominent both in battle and in the life of the city. Priam was now too old to take part in the fighting, although he continued to be the ultimate source of all authority. The *Iliad* refers to twenty-two of his sons by name, and later sources add further names to the list, whether from early epic or as products of later invention. For the most part, however, they have no specific stories, and merely appear for a moment in an epic battle scene before being killed or captured by a Greek opponent. Although Priam complains at the end of the *Iliad* that he has been robbed of most of his sons, he mentions the names of only two who were killed in the preceding years of the conflict, namely **Mestor**, whose legend has not survived, and **Troilos**,⁶⁹ who was killed at an early stage by Achilles when he was little more than a child, in circumstances that will be described below. His brother **Lycaon** was also caught by surprise by Achilles early in the war, but the Greek hero initially spared him, as we will see, even if he proved to be less forbearing when he encountered him on a second occasion.

By virtue of his role as the prime defender of Troy in the *Iliad*, **Hector** stands out from the other sons of Priam as the greatest warrior among them, and as a hero

moreover of distinctive and rounded character. In the latter respect, **Paris** alone is remotely comparable; and since the contrary often seems to be assumed, it should be remarked that Paris too was no mean warrior in spite of his effeminate airs. Hector is portrayed in the *Iliad* not only as a brave and chivalrous warrior who is surpassed by Achilles alone, but also as an affectionate husband and father. The famous passage in the *Iliad* in which Hector meets his wife Andromache, daughter of Eetion, on the ramparts before setting out for battle is one of the most moving sections of the poem (as was felt in classical Greece also, to judge by a remark in Plato's *Ion*).⁷⁰ Their infant son Astyanax (who is present at this meeting and is much alarmed by the nodding plume of Hector's helmet) was destined to meet a gruesome death during the sack of Troy (see p. 486). **Deiphobos** and **Helenos**, who make occasional appearances in the *Iliad* as notable sons of Priam, rose to their greatest prominence at the very end of the war, when they competed for the hand of Helen after the death of Paris, and Helenos withdrew from the city in anger at the outcome (see p. 481). **Polydoros** appears in the *Iliad* as the youngest and dearest son of Priam who enters battle against his father's order and is soon killed by Achilles;⁷¹ but, according to a conflicting tale that first appears in tragedy, Priam tried to secure him from danger, unsuccessfully as it turned out, by sending him away to Polymestor, a Thracian son-in-law of his, along with a quantity of treasure (see p. 488). Something has already been said about Aineias (see p. 446), who belonged to a junior branch of the Trojan royal family.

The earlier years of the war

For the first nine years of the war, the Trojans avoided direct contact with the enemy as far as they could, preferring to shelter behind their city walls in the hope that the Greeks would eventually become exhausted by the siege. This calculation was not altogether unsound, because the invaders often ran short of food and became demoralized by the stalemate; according to the *Cypria*, indeed, they might have sailed home at one point if Achilles had not restrained them.⁷² To raise the spirits of the troops and to deprive the Trojans of supplies and support, the Greeks, with Achilles to the fore, conducted raids against settlements in the area and also against islands and cities further down the coast, ranging as far south as Clazomenae and Colophon in some accounts.⁷³ Although Priam's stronghold itself, heavily garrisoned as it was and defended by a considerable force of Trojan and allied troops, was impregnable to the rudimentary siege operations of the period, the Greek campaign of attrition started to wear down the king's resources and made it impossible for him to replenish them by trade.

The events of this period of the war were recounted as follows in the latter part of the *Cypria*. After the failure of their diplomatic mission, the Greeks attacked the city, evidently without success, and then ravaged the countryside and cities of the area. When Achilles then wished to see Helen, a meeting was arranged by Thetis and Aphrodite; although it is understandable that he should have been curious to meet her, since he had been too young to be one of her suitors, nothing is known about any further motives that he might have had, since the story is never mentioned again

in any subsequent source, as is also the case with the next episode in the *Cypria*, in which Achilles restrained the troops when they wanted to leave and sail home. He then drove away the cattle of Aineias, and of Lyrnessos, Pedasos, and many of the neighbouring cities. The contrasting fates of two young sons of Priam were described in the next section of the poem, which told how the young Troilos was killed by Achilles, while Lycaon was sold into slavery on Lemnos by Patroclos (presumably after having been captured by Achilles as described in the *Iliad*). When prizes of war were then awarded, Achilles received Briseis and Agamemnon received Chryseis; the subsequent fate of these female captives is a central feature in the plot of the *Iliad*. After recounting the unsavoury story of the murder of Palamedes, the *Cypria* finally set the stage for the events described in the *Iliad*, by telling how Zeus devised a plan to provide some relief for the Trojans by causing Achilles to withdraw from the fray.⁷⁴

The *Cypria* would have offered full accounts of episodes to which the *Iliad* merely makes brief reference. Homer mentions that Achilles sacked Lyrnessos, killing its king, Mynes, along with a brother of his, and also that he sacked Hypoplacian Thebes, another city in the area, killing its ruler, Eetion, the father of Hector's wife Andromache, and his seven sons.⁷⁵ Briseis was taken captive at the former city and Chryseis at the latter. Achilles states in the *Iliad* that he sacked eleven cities in all in the Troad, seizing many fine treasures for Agamemnon to keep or distribute, and twelve more cities by the sea,⁷⁶ the island of Lesbos being mentioned elsewhere in the poem as being a place that he had successfully attacked.⁷⁷ Later sources add the names of other cities and islands that he attacked along the coast, including places as far south as Clazomenae and Colophon.

In what is doubtless the most famous episode in these early years of the war, Achilles ambushed and killed TROILOS, a young son of Priam, when he ventured out of the city with his sister Polyxena to fetch water from a fountain-house. As can be seen in vase-paintings of the incident, Troilos was hardly more than a child. Although Priam refers to his death in the *Iliad*,⁷⁸ no details are offered there or in any other pre-Hellenistic source, and we have to rely on visual images to gain an idea of how the story would have been told in the earliest tradition. On the François vase, which can be dated to about 570 BC, Achilles can be seen pursuing the beardless Troilos as he tries to escape on his horse, and a woman, almost certainly Polyxena as in other images of the kind, is shown running away ahead of them. Or, on other vases, Achilles drags Troilos from his horse by his hair, or kills him at an altar. In another version of the legend, first attested by the Hellenistic poet Lycophron, Achilles conceived a passion for the young Troilos and pursued him with amorous intent, causing him to take refuge in the shrine of Thymbraian Apollo; but on finding that he could neither win him over nor persuade him to leave the shrine, he went inside and decapitated him at the altar.⁷⁹ Some late sources suggest that Achilles had a justifiable reason for killing the helpless youth, by saying that a prophecy had declared that Troy would be impregnable if he survived to the age of twenty, or that his death was a precondition for the fall of the city.⁸⁰ Although Troilos is best remembered nowadays for the story of his romance with Cressida, that lies beyond the scope of the present work as a fiction of medieval origin.⁸¹

As for LYCAON, the other son of Priam who was encountered by Achilles outside the walls during this earlier part of the war, the hero captured him while he was cutting fig-wood for chariot-rails in his father's orchard at night. Achilles spared his life, however, and took him away to the island of Lemnos, where he sold him to Euneos, a son of Jason (see p. 400 for the circumstances of Euneos' birth). Or, in the *Cypria*, as we have seen, Patroclus sold him there on Achilles' behalf. Lycaon was subsequently ransomed by a friend of the family, but although his rescuer tried to keep him away from the war, he ran away and returned to his father's palace in Troy. After he had enjoyed the company of his friends for eleven days, he entered battle on the twelfth (for we are now in the period covered in the *Iliad*, after direct hostilities have resumed); and when he had the misfortune to encounter Achilles for a second time, he was slaughtered without mercy, plead though he might.⁸²

Odysseus and the murder of Palamedes

There is one notable story from the early years of the war that remains to be considered, the inglorious tale of the murder of Palamedes, whose death was contrived by Odysseus with some help from Diomedes. Odysseus and Palamedes resembled one another in so far as both were marked out by their intelligence and ingenuity, and it was this common feature that caused them to come into conflict in the first place, creating the ill-feeling that would provide occasion for the murder.

ODYSSEUS was the king of rocky Ithaca, an island that lay off the west coast of Central Greece, and the husband of the proverbially faithful Penelope. She was a daughter of Icarios, the younger brother of Tyndareos, king of Sparta; for the circumstances of her marriage to Odysseus, see pp. 447 and 453. Telemachos, their only child, was still an infant when the war broke out. Odysseus was a hero of idiosyncratic character who relied as much on ingenuity and cunning, not to mention sheer unscrupulousness, to achieve his ends as on his indubitable bravery and resource; and during the war, he was prominent accordingly in every episode that required quick wits. Although formidable in battle, he was not one of the very foremost champions; when lots are cast in the *Iliad*, for instance, to see who will fight Hector, the Greeks pray that the lot may fall on Ajax, Diomedes, or Agamemnon rather than on Odysseus.⁸³ He was valued for his shrewd and helpful advice, and is often represented as acting in conjunction with Diomedes, as on the present occasion, or more creditably when they worked together to steal the Palladion, a talisman that was protecting Troy (see p. 481).

PALAMEDES, who is not mentioned in the Homeric epics but appeared in the *Cypria* in connection with the present story, was considered to have been quite as clever as Odysseus, and was credited with all manner of inventions, ranging from dice and draughts to weights and measures, and even the devising of the Greek alphabet.⁸⁴ He was the son of a man who was no less accomplished in his own area of expertise, the great seafarer Nauplios (see p. 219). While accompanying other envoys to recruit leading warriors for the Trojan War, he incurred the undying enmity of Odysseus by exposing a ruse that the wily Ithacan had adopted to avoid serving in the war, as he was obliged to do as a former suitor of Helen.

Although Homer suggests at most that Agamemnon and Menelaos did not find it altogether easy to persuade Odysseus to come, the *Cypria* already presented him as feigning madness when Menelaos and Nestor (in this account) arrived to recruit him, only to have his pretence exposed when they seized his infant son Telemachos ‘for punishment’ at the prompting of Palamedes.⁸⁵ The meaning of these words from the surviving summary of the epic is made clearer in later narratives, in which Palamedes himself acts to expose the pretence by threatening the child with a sword, or by placing him in front of a plough, to show that Odysseus is quite sane enough to come to his rescue. In the earliest full account that has survived, recorded by Hyginus,⁸⁶ Odysseus is said to have had some reason to want to avoid taking part in the war, since he had received a prophecy telling him that he would come back alone and impoverished after twenty years, after having lost all of his companions; so he yoked two ill-assorted beasts together, a horse and an ox, to plough his fields (which he also sowed with salt in some accounts to heighten the show of madness⁸⁷); but Palamedes recognized that this was no more than a ruse, and seized Telemachos and placed him in front of the plough to make Odysseus reveal his true state of mind.⁸⁸

Odysseus was embittered against him from that time onwards, and all the more so when Palamedes won great popularity among the troops during the long siege by, among other things, devising amusing games to help them to while away the time (see [Figure 21.2](#)). He thus proceeded to contrive his death, enlisting the aid of Diomedes. In the earliest account, as reported for the *Cypria*, he and his friend drowned him while he was out fishing, a most ignominious end for a Greek warrior.⁸⁹ Or else he forged a letter under the name of Priam promising Palamedes a large sum of gold for betraying his fellow Greeks, and ensured that the message would be discovered on the body of a murdered prisoner. When it was subsequently read out in front of Agamemnon and the other leaders, they agreed that Palamedes’ tent should be searched, and discovered quantities of gold that had been hidden there beforehand by Odysseus; and Palamedes was condemned accordingly and stoned to death.⁹⁰ Or, in another version, Agamemnon himself joined together with Odysseus and Diomedes to plot his death in much the same way, because all of them were jealous of his popularity and fame.⁹¹ There is also a late account in which Odysseus and Diomedes told him that some treasure had been hidden in a well, and hurled stones down on him when he climbed into the well to look for it.⁹²



Figure 21.2. Achilles and Ajax playing draughts. Drawing after a vase-painting.

This murder, however it was contrived, would have fateful consequences for the Greeks in general at a later time, because Nauplios, the father of Palamedes, would set out to avenge it by luring many of them to their death while they were sailing home from Troy, see further on p. 498.

Foreign allies and final confrontations

The events of the Iliad

The events narrated in the *Iliad* are set in the tenth and final year of the war and mark the beginning of the final stage of the conflict. Direct confrontation has now resumed between the Greeks and the Trojans, and a series of exotic allies will come to the support of the Trojans, starting with Rhesos, a Thracian, within the period covered in the *Iliad*; and some of the very foremost warriors will finally meet their deaths, including Hector, Achilles, Paris, and (through suicide) Ajax. As the last events before the fall of the city are contrived at long last through a ruse, various prophetically announced preconditions then have to be fulfilled.

By contrast to the other epics in the Trojan cycle, which were composed somewhat later (even if most of their content would probably have been familiar to Homer), the *Iliad* has a very limited timescale, and the bulk of the poem is devoted to four crucial days in the fighting. It is announced at the beginning of the poem that its theme will be the anger of Achilles, as provoked by a quarrel between him and the leader of the expedition, Agamemnon, who offended his pride by depriving him of his concubine and valued war-prize, BRISEIS. Agamemnon had been awarded a similar war-prize, a captive woman called CHRYSEIS, but her father Chryses, who was a priest of Apollo, had come to the Greek camp to request her ransom; and when Agamemnon had sent him away under threat of violence, he had prayed for vengeance to Apollo, who had proceeded to shoot arrows into the Greek camp to cause a plague. When the seer Calchas had explained the cause of the disease, stating

that it could be brought to an end only if Chryseis were returned to her father without demand of a ransom, Agamemnon had reluctantly agreed to surrender her; but he had insisted on being compensated for his loss, and had reacted to some critical comments from Achilles by telling him to hand over Briseis for that purpose. Now Achilles was greatly attached to Briseis, and he would have regarded this as an unacceptable slight to his honour in any case. So he withdrew his allegiance from Agamemnon and stayed away from the fighting, taking his Myrmidon followers and friend Patroclus with him.⁹³ When deprived in this way of their foremost champion, the Greeks at last became vulnerable to Trojan attack; and although they managed to hold their ground for a time while Diomedes was dominating the field, they were soon driven back to their camp by the shore, and were obliged to fortify it with a ditch and a wall.⁹⁴ The Trojans were then able to camp out on the plain for the first time since the Greek landing, their watch-fires shining out like countless stars on a clear windless night.⁹⁵

At the urging of Nestor and the other leaders, Agamemnon now agreed to seek a reconciliation with Achilles, and sent Phoinix, Odysseus, and the Telamonian Ajax to him as envoys to promise him the return of Briseis and valuable compensation besides, including marriage to a daughter of Agamemnon and seven cities as her dowry if the war should be brought to a successful conclusion. Each of the envoys pressed him to accept these terms, Odysseus speaking first and then old Phoinix, who was able to appeal to him in more personal terms because he had known him since his childhood, having acted as his tutor for a period. He, too, failed to sway the embittered Achilles, however, and the last speaker, Ajax, was not much more successful, even though his inarticulate appeal proved to be more effective than the eloquent speeches of his companions. Achilles would promise no more than to reconsider his position if the enemy should break through to the Greek camp and begin to set fire to the ships. He definitely put himself in the wrong by rejecting these princely overtures; and there is thus a certain poetic justice in the heavy misfortune that befell him afterwards when he lost his closest friend.⁹⁶

On the following day, the Greeks conducted a successful counter-attack with Agamemnon at the forefront, almost driving the Trojans back into their city; but the Greek fortunes turned as Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Odysseus were successively wounded; and when Hector then returned to the fighting (for Zeus had warned him to stay away as long as Agamemnon was in the field), the tide of the battle was soon reversed and the Greeks were driven back towards their ships.⁹⁷ Attacking the Greek wall with several columns at once, Hector breached the gate with a huge stone and led the Trojans through to the ships in the face of determined opposition from Ajax.⁹⁸ When they were almost in a position to set fire to the ships, and had actually kindled the stern of one of them, Achilles yielded to the pleas of his favourite retainer PATROCLOS, who had witnessed the disaster, and allowed him to borrow his armour and enter battle at the head of the Myrmidons. Supposing that they were under attack from Achilles himself, the Trojans retreated in disorder, suffering many losses as Patroclus pursued them almost up to the city walls. By taking the pursuit this far, he was disobeying the orders of Achilles, who had told him to come back safely after driving the enemy from the ships; and he was killed under the walls

owing to the intervention of Apollo, who knocked his helmet and armour from his body, leaving him dazed and exposed. Euphorbos, son of Panthoos, took advantage of the situation to wound him in the back with his spear, and Hector finished him off with a spear-thrust to the belly.⁹⁹

During the ensuing struggle for the body of Patroclos, Menelaos killed Euphorbos, but was pressed back by the Trojans under the leadership of Hector, who then stripped Achilles' armour from the corpse; the Greeks finally managed to recover the corpse, however, and carried it back towards the ships with the Trojans in close pursuit. On hearing of his friend's death, Achilles lamented so bitterly that his mother Thetis rose up from the sea with her sister-Nereids to investigate. He told her that he was determined to avenge the death of Patroclos by killing Hector, even though he was warned by her that he would be fated to meet his own death soon afterwards. After she left to fetch him a new set of armour from Hephaistos, he took some immediate action on the advice of the divine messenger Iris, by advancing to the trench that protected the camp and giving three mighty shouts to cast fear into the Trojans. On hearing him, they fell back in alarm, giving the Greeks an opportunity to remove the corpse of Patroclos from the field.¹⁰⁰ After receiving his new armour from Thetis early on the following morning, Achilles summoned an assembly to settle his differences with Agamemnon. He formally renounced his anger, while Agamemnon offered a rather grudging apology and offered to pay due compensation.

After returning to battle, Achilles soon routed the Trojans, slaughtering many of them with great brutality and angering the river-god Scamandros by choking his waters with corpses (see p. 41). He might even have forced his way into the city if Apollo had not intervened, first by inciting Agenor to make a stand and then by luring Achilles away in the guise of Agenor (see p. 468). All the Trojan warriors were able to escape back into the city as a consequence, leaving Hector alone to confront Achilles outside the city walls. On seeing Achilles advancing towards him like a war-god, Hector lost his nerve and took to flight; but after he had been pursued three times around the walls, Athena appeared to him in the guise of his brother Deiphobos to trick him into making a stand. He was fatally wounded in the ensuing duel with a spear-wound to the neck. Although he pleaded with Achilles to allow his body to be ransomed to his parents for an honourable burial, Achilles threaded leather thongs through his ankles after his death, attached the corpse to his chariot, and dragged it past the city in full sight of the Trojans and then down to the Greek camp.¹⁰¹ After the funeral of Patroclos and the splendid funeral-games that followed,¹⁰² Achilles continued to brood over Patroclos' death and to mistreat Hector's corpse for eleven days, until the gods finally intervened. Thetis was dispatched to her son to order him to accept a ransom for Hector's body, while Iris visited Priam to order him to bring a ransom to Achilles. So Priam made a secret visit to the Greek camp at night under the guidance of Hermes, and appealed as a suppliant to Achilles, who was at last moved to pity and joined with the old man in lamenting the sorrows of the war. Achilles sent him away with his son's body on the following morning, and the poem ends with Hector's funeral.¹⁰³

Three foreign allies of the Trojans: Rhesos, Penthesileia, and Memnon

The Greeks were never entirely able to sever the communications between the Trojans and their numerous allies in Thrace and Asia. These allies can be divided into two main groups, those who are listed in the catalogue of Trojan forces at the end of the second book of the *Iliad* 104 (most of whom were apparently present from the early years of the war) and the handful of allies of more exotic character who arrived in the last stages of the war. Few significant heroes are to be found among the allies of the first group; only Sarpedon and Glaucos, from Lycia in the south-western corner of Asia Minor (see pp. 298ff.), are of any real importance. Sarpedon was the most prominent victim of Patroclus; after his death, Zeus ordered Hypnos and Thanatos (Sleep and Death) to carry his body home to Lycia. The first of the more exotic allies was the Thracian king Rhesos, whose arrival and speedy death are described in the *Iliad*; the adventures of the others – the Amazon Penthesileia, the Ethiopian Memnon, and Eurypylos, son of Telephos – were recounted in the next two epics in the Trojan cycle, the *Aithiopis* and the *Little Iliad*. These latter figures were warriors of the highest stature who were capable of presenting a genuine threat to the Greeks. They might have remained as familiar as Hector if we still possessed the early epics that commemorated their exploits; a late epic account of the last stages of the war can be found in the *Posthomerica* of Quintus of Smyrna, a poem composed in the fourth century AD.¹⁰⁵

By calling RHESOS a son of the Thracian king Eioneus, Homer differs from later authors, who generally state that he was borne to the Thracian river-god Strymon by one or other of the Muses.¹⁰⁶ In the Homeric account, he arrived at Troy with some Thracian followers on the night before the Trojan attack on the Greek ships, and camped some distance away from the main Greek force. His horses were whiter than snow and swifter than the wind, his chariot was fashioned from gold and silver, and his magnificent golden armour seemed more suitable for a god than a mortal. During his first night at Troy, which was fated to be his last, Odysseus and Diomedes happened to creep out as scouts to check on what the enemy were doing; and they ran across Dolon, a none too heroic Trojan who had set out on a comparable mission. Dolon was dressed in a wolf's skin, and he had undertaken the mission after Hector had promised to give him the chariot and divine horses of Achilles. Overcome with terror, he soon informed his captors about the dispositions of the Trojans and about their new ally in particular; but it brought him no benefit since Diomedes cut off his head all the same. As a result of this stroke of fortune, the two Greeks were able to catch the Thracians in their sleep. Diomedes put Rhesos and twelve of his companions to the sword while Odysseus seized the snow-white horses.¹⁰⁷ Later sources cite prophecies to justify this nocturnal slaughter. According to *Rhesos*, a surviving play based on this episode, which is dubiously ascribed to Euripides, Athena had revealed that no Greek would be able to withstand Rhesos if he should live through the night; or in another account, an oracle had revealed that Troy would be impregnable if Rhesos' horses grazed on the plain or drank from the Scamandros. In a version ascribed to Pindar, Hera and Athena advised the night-raid after Rhesos had fought against the Greeks for a day, inflicting great damage on

them.¹⁰⁸

When the fortunes of the Trojans were at a low ebb after the death of Hector, a force of Amazons arrived at Troy under the leadership of PENTHESILEIA, who was a daughter of the war-god Ares by Otrere, queen of the Amazons. She had come to seek purification from Priam after accidentally killing a relative, or else to seek glory in battle since it was a law of the Amazons that they must do so if they were to be allowed to consort with men.¹⁰⁹ She fought bravely, killing many of the Greeks, including Machaon, son of Asclepios, until she was finally killed in her turn by Achilles, who admired her prowess and mourned for her after her death. Her legend was recounted in the *Aithiopis*, the next epic in the Trojan cycle after the *Iliad*, as was the legend of Memnon, king of the Ethiopians.¹¹⁰ Although this epic would presumably have been very different in tone from the *Iliad*, allowing freer rein to the fantastical, the Homeric epic does refer to the Amazons on two occasions, as former adversaries of Bellerophon (see p. 221) and of Priam (who had helped to defeat them in his younger days when they had invaded neighbouring Phrygia).¹¹¹

Achilles' sympathy with the dead Amazon was greeted with scorn by the brutish THERSITES, who made fun of him, saying that he had fallen in love with her. He also mutilated her corpse in some accounts, by gouging out one or both of her eyes with the point of his spear. Achilles lost his temper and killed him with a blow to the face; and since the slaying caused dissension in the Greek camp, he sailed away to Lesbos afterwards to be purified. The rites were performed by Odysseus after Achilles had first offered sacrifices to Apollo, Artemis, and Leto. This purification from the *Aithiopis* is the first to be attested in Greek literature (for there is no mention of this procedure in the Homeric epics).¹¹² Thersites belonged to a junior branch of the Aetolian royal family as a son of Agrios ('the Wild'), son of Porthaon (see p. 382). He was remembered in Aetolian myth for having joined together with his brothers to depose and mistreat his aged uncle, Oineus, king of Calydon (see p. 388). The *Iliad* presents him by contrast as a man of low birth who is the ugliest man in the army (which would itself be taken as a sign of base origin). When he abuses Agamemnon at the assembly that is convened after the withdrawal of Achilles, he is soon silenced by Odysseus, who exposed him to general ridicule by beating him on the back and shoulders with his golden sceptre.¹¹³ It seems unlikely, however, that the *Aethiopis* would have presented him as a mere commoner (let alone as the uncouth figure of the *Iliad*) if Achilles' action in killing him provoked serious discord among the Greek leaders. It may even be the case that Diomedes (who was descended from the Aetolian royal family) already took the lead in objecting to his action as in the late Trojan epic of Quintus of Smyrna.¹¹⁴ Since Homer describes Thersites as being lame and misshapen, a tale was invented in later times to account for his condition. While participating in the hunt for the Calydonian boar, so the story claimed, he deserted his position out of terror, and Meleager, the leader of the hunt, was so angry that he threw or chased him over a cliff.¹¹⁵

Soon after the death of Penthesileia, MEMNON, son of Eos (Dawn) and Tithonos, arrived at Troy with a force of Ethiopians. Although his people, the Aithiopes or 'Burnt-faces', came to be identified with the black Africans who lived in the lands to the south of Egypt, they were originally a purely mythical people who lived near the

sunrise at the edges of the earth; and Memnon's kingdom was usually located in the east accordingly, whether in a mythical region beyond the known world or in Syria or Persia. According to some authors from Herodotus onwards, he had come from Susa, the old administrative capital of Persia,¹¹⁶ but it was sometimes suggested in later times, when the Ethiopians had come to be associated with Africa above all, that he had led his Ethiopians out of their original homeland in Africa in the hope of winning a kingdom in Asia.¹¹⁷ He was the last and perhaps the most formidable of the opponents of Achilles, whom he resembled in some notable respects, for he too was a son of a goddess who owned divine armour that had been fashioned by Hephaistos. The surviving accounts of this episode provide very little detail. The summary of the *Aethiopis* merely states that Memnon came to assist the Trojans wearing his divine armour, and that after Thetis gave some information about him to Achilles, a battle took place in which Antilochos was killed by Memnon, and Memnon himself was then killed by Achilles, whereupon Eos won the gift of immortality from Zeus for Memnon, who was of course her son (see [Figure 21.3](#)).¹¹⁸



[Figure 21.3](#). The dying Memnon is borne away by his mother, Eos (Dawn). Red-figure cup by Douris. Musée du Louvre. © akg-images/André Held.

Since Antilochos, the eldest son of Nestor, was a close friend of Achilles, and indeed his very closest friend since the death of Patroklos, Memnon inevitably incurred his own destruction when he killed him, because Achilles would be sure to avenge his death as he had previously avenged that of Patroklos. It is mentioned in the *Odyssey* that Antilochos died at the hand of a son of Eos, and Odysseus refers to Antilochos in conjunction with Memnon elsewhere in the poem, saying that this son

of Nestor was the most handsome man at Troy apart from Memnon (who could be expected to be radiantly beautiful as a son of Eos).¹¹⁹ Later sources have virtually nothing to add, except that Pindar reports further details about the death of Antilochos, quite possibly in accordance with the early epic tradition, saying that he sacrificed his own life to save that of his father. For when Nestor's chariot became immobilized after one of his horses was wounded by an arrow shot by Apollo, he appealed to his son to save him from Memnon, who was aiming his spear at him, and Antilochos thus came to be struck down in place of him.¹²⁰

Even if the *Aethiopis* presented Eos as having won immortality for her son, there was another tradition that suggested that he was buried in the Troad beside a stream called the Asopos. In the late epic of Quintus, the breezes of dawn join together at the bidding of Eos to carry his corpse to that spot;¹²¹ he was then buried by his Ethiopian comrades, and, as they were lamenting for him afterwards, Eos transformed them into birds known as the Memnonides, which have wheeled above the spot ever since, wailing for him with their cries and scattering dust down on his grave.¹²² Or, in the earliest surviving account of them by Ovid, these birds, which may be compared to the birds of Diomedes (see p. 504), were formed at the will of Zeus from the smoke that rose up from Memnon's pyre, and they then divided into groups and fought with one another until they finally fell down on to the ashes as death-offerings to the hero.¹²³

The death of Achilles and suicide of Ajax

After the death of Memnon, Achilles put the Trojans to flight, chasing them back across the plain, only to be killed in his turn by Paris and Apollo as he was rushing into the city in close pursuit. Such was the account that was offered in the *Aethiopis* of the next episode, in which the Greeks seem to have come as close as they ever could to seizing Troy by force of arms, rather than through a deception after the death of this greatest warrior of theirs, as would eventually come about. The prediction of the dying Hector in the *Iliad* that Achilles would be killed by Paris and Apollo at the Scaean gates¹²⁴ was now brought to fulfilment. We should doubtless imagine that Paris shot the arrow while Apollo ensured that it hit its exact target, even if that is not explicitly stated in any early source. Pindar suggests, by contrast, that Apollo assumed the form of Paris to cause the death of Achilles so as to achieve his desired end of delaying the fall of Troy.¹²⁵ Although the idea that Achilles was invulnerable except in his foot and ankle (see p. 431) does not appear in literary sources until the Roma period, vase-paintings suggest that it was already believed at a much earlier period that he was shot in that region; and if that was the case, and it was in fact necessary that he should be shot there and nowhere else, Apollo's intervention would have been all the more necessary and significant.

A mighty struggle then ensued between the Greeks and Trojans for the body of Achilles (so the *Aethiopis* went on to recount), and Ajax seized hold of the corpse and carried it back to the Greek ships, while Odysseus fought off the Trojans from behind. When the Greeks had buried Antilochos and prepared the body of Achilles, Thetis arrived with her sisters and the Muses to mourn for her dead son, and

snatched his body from the funeral-pyre to convey it to Leuce (the White Island, a home for the favoured dead on the earth's surface, see p. 105).¹²⁶ These events are described in similar terms in the *Odyssey*, which refers to the struggle for Achilles' corpse and the crucial part that Ajax played in it, and also tells how Thetis rose up from the sea with her Nereid sisters after her son's body had been cleaned and laid out. They then mourned for seven days and nights along with his comrades, the dirges being led by the Muses. When the hero's body was fully consumed by the flames of the funeral-pyre, his comrades gathered up his remains to place them in a golden urn that had been fashioned by Hephaistos, mixing them together with those of Patroklos, and they then raised a huge burial mound over the remains of these two heroes and those of Antilochos, setting it up on a headland of the Hellespont so that it could be seen from far out at sea.¹²⁷

As this would indicate, Achilles dies in the usual way in the Homeric view to descend to the Underworld, where he is later seen by Odysseus among the shades of the dead, and tells him that he would much prefer to be a serf in the world above than to be king of all the dead.¹²⁸ In the subsequent tradition, however, it was generally accepted that he was granted immortality, as in the *Aethiopis*. The lyric poets Ibycus and Simonides suggested that he was transferred to Elysion to live there with Medeia as his wife, while Pindar names him as being among the favoured dead on the Isles of the Blessed, having been brought there by his mother with the consent of Zeus.¹²⁹ Or else he went to live on Leuce with Helen as his wife, or contracted a posthumous marriage with Iphigeneia or Priam's daughter Polyxena.¹³⁰

After the funeral of Achilles, splendid games were held in his honour, and his divine arms and armour were offered as a prize to the Greek warrior who was adjudged to be the bravest. According to the *Odyssey*, Thetis set up the contest, and it was judged by the goddess Athena and 'the sons of the Trojans', apparently meaning the Trojan captives, who might be expected to be able to offer a worthwhile opinion on the basis of their own experience.¹³¹ The prize was awarded to Odysseus, to his own subsequent regret, for he states in his account of his visit to the Underworld, where he sees the angry Ajax standing apart from all the other shades, that he wishes that he had never won the contest, openly acknowledging that Ajax was a peerless warrior second only to Achilles.¹³² It is indicated in this passage that the decision aroused great anger in Ajax and led to his death, but no further details are offered. In the curious version offered in the *Little Iliad*, the next epic in the Trojan cycle, some men were sent out at the suggestion of Nestor to eavesdrop under the walls of Troy, and they heard two girls arguing about the relative merits of Ajax and Odysseus. When one asserted that Ajax was the braver because he had carried Achilles' body from the battlefield while Odysseus had not ventured to do so, the other girl retorted, through the prompting of Athena, who specially favoured Odysseus, that even a woman could carry such a load once it had been put on her shoulders, but she would not have the nerve to fight off the enemy (as Odysseus had done while covering Ajax's retreat).¹³³ In subsequent accounts, the Greeks are often said to have settled the issue themselves by a ballot (see [Figure 21.4](#)).¹³⁴



Figure 21.4. The voting over the arms of Achilles. Red-figure vase by Douris. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna 3695. © akg-images/Erich Lessing.

By whatever process, Odysseus was selected to receive the prize of honour, to the anger and astonishment of Ajax, who was unable to believe even for a moment that Odysseus was the better man; and, to judge by the surviving literature, Ajax really did deserve to win the contest if sheer courage, steadfastness, and prowess in hand-to-hand combat were to be regarded as the criterion. The tragic results of the decision, as briefly stated in the surviving summary of the *Little Iliad*, were that Ajax went mad, destroyed the herds of the Greeks, and then killed himself.¹³⁵ Sophocles' *Ajax* provides the earliest full account of these events, although Pindar already notes in passing that Ajax killed himself by falling on to his sword when the night was far gone.¹³⁶ According to Sophocles, he planned to avenge his ill-deserved defeat by attacking the Greek leaders while they were asleep at night, but Athena frustrated his intent by sending him mad, so that he went on to kill their cattle and sheep instead. When he returned to his proper senses and discovered what he had done, he was so ashamed that he resolved to commit suicide, in spite of the pleas of his concubine Tecmessa.¹³⁷ As the artistic evidence makes clear, it was agreed from an early period that he fixed his sword into the earth and fell on it (see [Figure 21.5](#)). There was a tradition that suggested, moreover, that he was vulnerable only at the point where the sword transfixed him, at his chest or collar-bone, see p. 433. In the *Little Iliad*, Agamemnon refused him a proper heroic funeral by cremation, ordering that he should be interred in a coffin instead,¹³⁸ whereas in Sophocles' play, Menelaos and Agamemnon propose that his corpse should be left in the open as prey for scavengers, but Odysseus persuades Agamemnon to allow him to be given a proper burial.¹³⁹



Figure 21.5. Ajax's suicide. Attic cup, Brygos painter. Attic red-figured kylix attributed to Brygos painter c. 490–470 BC. Image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

As his child by Tecmessa, Ajax left a son called Eurysaces (meaning Broad Shield, in reference to his father's towering shield, see p. 433), for whom Ajax's half-brother Teucros now became responsible.¹⁴⁰ It will be remembered that Teucros had been borne to Telamon, king of Salamis, by his concubine Hesione rather than by his wife (see p. 262). When Teucros arrived back at the island of Salamis after the war, his father was so angry that he had returned without Ajax that he banished him, and Teucros settled abroad in Cyprus.¹⁴¹ Some mythographers explained that Telamon had special cause for anger, because Teucros had failed to bring Ajax's ashes and arrived without his son and concubine, who happened to have sailed on another ship.¹⁴²

Preconditions for the fall of Troy; Philoctetes shoots Paris, Neoptolemos kills Eurypylos, and Odysseus steals the Palladion

During the next stage of the conflict, the Greeks took three important steps to advance the prospect of final victory. They fetched their long-abandoned comrade Philoctetes, who proceeded to kill Paris with the bow of Heracles; they fetched Achilles' young son Neoptolemos, who would make a crucial contribution to the subsequent fighting, helping to fill the gap that had been left by the death of his father; and Odysseus stole into Troy to steal its protective talisman, the Palladion (an ancient image of Athena, see p. 443). These measures were revealed by a prophecy

(or prophecies) as actions that needed to be taken as preconditions for the fall of Troy.

In the *Little Iliad*, Odysseus mounted an ambush to capture Helenos, a son of Priam who was a gifted seer; and Helenos revealed, doubtless under pressure, that the great archer Philoctetes should be fetched from Lemnos (where he had been marooned during the outward voyage because he had come to be afflicted with a festering wound, see p. 465). Once he had been recovered from Lemnos by Diomedes, he was finally cured of his wound by Machaon, who was a son of Asclepios, the greatest of all healers. He then fought in single combat with Paris and shot him dead. Menelaos, who had ample reason to hate Paris, mutilated his corpse, but the Trojans eventually recovered it to give it a proper burial. The Greeks then took the two further actions mentioned above, by fetching Neoptolemos from his birthplace, the island of Scyros, and seizing the Palladion, quite possibly as further measures that had been advised by the captured Helenos (although nothing is explicitly stated on the matter in the surviving testimonies on the *Little Iliad*).¹⁴³

Apollodorus offers a rather different account of these events, in which Helenos was not captured until after the death of Paris, and the Greek seer Calchas started off by revealing that Troy could not be taken unless the Greeks had the bow of Heracles, which was in the possession of Philoctetes (see p. 269 for the story of how he came to acquire it). In response to that prophecy, Odysseus travelled to Lemnos with Diomedes, gained hold of the bow through a trick, and persuaded Philoctetes – who had good reason to be disaffected with his comrades – to sail to Troy. After being healed of his wound, by Machaon's brother Podaleirios in this account, Philoctetes shot Paris dead as usual. After the death of Paris, his brothers Helenos and Deiphobos competed for Helen's hand, and Helenos was so aggrieved when she was awarded to his brother that he left the city to live outside on Mt Ida. In response to fresh advice from Calchas, who declared that Helenos had knowledge of oracles relating to the fate of the city, Odysseus captured Helenos in an ambush, and forced him to reveal three further measures that needed to be taken if Troy was to fall, namely that the Greeks should fetch Neoptolemos, steal the Palladion, and send for the bones of Pelops.¹⁴⁴

That last condition for the fall of Troy is first mentioned by the Hellenistic poet Lycophron.¹⁴⁵ It is not clear why the presence of these bones, which were said to have been buried in the Eleian town of Letrina near Olympia,¹⁴⁶ should have affected the fate of Troy, although the Asiatic origin of Pelops (see p. 419) may have had some connection with the matter. According to a tale recorded by Pausanias, only a shoulder-bone was fetched, and it was lost during the return voyage when the ship that was carrying it was wrecked in a storm off Euboea (evidently the storm that was sent by Athena, see p. 498). Many years later, a fisherman from the Euboean city of Eretria caught the bone in his nets, and he was so amazed by its size that he travelled to Delphi to consult the oracle about it. Eleian envoys happened to be there at the time, seeking a cure for a plague; and they were advised to restore the shoulder-bone to its proper home, while the fisherman was advised to hand it over to them. The Eleians rewarded its finder (who was named Damarmenos) by appointing him and his descendants to be the guardians of the bone.¹⁴⁷

When Neoptolemos arrived in the Troad after being fetched by Odysseus from his birthplace of Scyros (see p. 432), he took the lead in defeating the last major ally of the Trojans, EURYPYLOS, son of Telephos. It is fitting that his opponent in the last heroic duel of the war should be the son of a hero who had fought against his father Achilles when the Greeks had first set foot on Asian soil (see p. 462). Eurypylos arrived with a force of troops from Mysia, which lay in an adjoining region of Asia Minor. Nothing more is reported of the subsequent events described in the *Little Iliad* other than that Eurypylos showed his prowess, killing Machaon, son of Asclepios, and others, until he was killed in his turn by Neoptolemos.¹⁴⁸ Later sources add the Boeotian chieftain Peneleos to the list of his victims.¹⁴⁹ The *Odyssey* makes a passing allusion to the death of Eurypylos, remarking that he and many of his comrades died ‘because of gifts made to a woman’, evidently in reference to a well-known story.¹⁵⁰ According to the early mythographer Acusilaus, Eurypylos had been held back in Mysia by his mother when Priam had sought his assistance, until Priam bribed her to change her mind by sending her a wonderful golden vine.¹⁵¹ It is reported elsewhere that Zeus had presented this marvel to one of Priam’s predecessors, either Tros or Laomedon, as compensation for the abduction of Ganymedes (see p. 442); and since a fragment from early epic mentions that Laomedon was given a golden vine that had been made by Hephaistos for that reason,¹⁵² it is quite possible that the preceding story was recounted in the *Little Iliad*. The Homeric allusion was also explained through the idea that Priam promised one of his daughters to Eurypylos if he would come to fight for him as an ally.¹⁵³ A major exploit was required for Neoptolemos in any case, now that the war was nearing its end, and it was Eurypylos’ function to provide an occasion for it.

After the death of Eurypylos, Odysseus entered Troy surreptitiously to steal the city’s protective talisman. In the early epic account in the *Little Iliad*, he made two secret incursions, first entering the city in beggar’s disguise to spy out the ground, and then returning with Diomedes to steal the Palladion. Although he was seen and recognized by Helen during his first incursion, she did not betray him but engaged in a treacherous conversation instead, discussing plans for the taking of the city; it would seem that she had become discontented with her predicament at Troy.¹⁵⁴ This encounter is already mentioned in the *Odyssey*, in which Helen herself tells his son Telemachos how she had recognized Odysseus in the city, and had taken him home and bathed him. After she had sworn not to betray him, Odysseus had then revealed all that the Greeks were intending. He put many Trojans to the sword before leaving, so she recounts, causing the women of the city to lament, but she for her own part rejoiced in her heart, because she had already begun to think of returning home, and she now regretted that Aphrodite had beguiled her into leaving her husband, child, and native land.¹⁵⁵ In Apollodorus’ account, Odysseus is said to have made only a single incursion. After creeping up to the city by night with Diomedes, he disguised himself as a beggar and entered undetected, leaving his comrade waiting outside; although he was recognized by Helen while in the city, he stole the Palladion nevertheless with her assistance, and then, after killing many of the Trojan guards, took it back to the Greek ships with the help of Diomedes.¹⁵⁶ Some claimed that Odysseus and Diomedes stole into the city through a sewer, as they were said to

have done in a lost play by Sophocles,¹⁵⁷ and there is artistic evidence for a version in which they seized the statue jointly.

In a version that presents both heroes in a bad light, Diomedes entered the city on his own to steal the Palladion after having contrived to leave Odysseus behind, by failing to help him climb up the city walls after having stood on his shoulders to do so. During the return journey, Odysseus raised his sword to seize the trophy and the glory for himself, but Diomedes was alerted by a glint of moonlight from the blade (or by the shadow of the blade), and so forced Odysseus to walk in front of him for the rest of the way. This story was cited in explanation of the proverbial phrase ‘Diomedean compulsion’, which is said to have originated in the *Little Iliad*. Although some such incident was presumably described in that epic, the circumstances must have been rather different because Odysseus himself was presented as carrying the Palladion out of the city.¹⁵⁸

The fall of Troy and sack of the city

The stratagem of the Wooden Horse; the ruse of Sinon and fate of Laocoon

Finding that the city still seemed as impregnable as ever in spite of these various measures, the Greeks adopted a new approach by attempting a ruse rather than relying on the open use of force as hitherto. For, at the suggestion of Athena (or of that most ingenious of mortals Odysseus), they constructed a huge Wooden Horse with a hollow interior to serve as a hiding place for a concealed force of troops (see Figure 21.6). A cleverly disguised trap-door was set in its side to enable them to enter and leave. According to the earliest account in the *Odyssey*, it was built by Epeios, son of Panopeus, a hero from Phocis (see p. 427), with the assistance of Athena, and the Greeks hid a force of men inside under the command of Odysseus and then sailed away, setting fire to their huts to make the Trojans believe that they were leaving. The Trojans dragged the Horse into the city and argued at length about what they should do with it, some proposing that they should break it open, others that they should drag it to the top of a cliff and throw it over, and others again that they should leave it where it was as an offering to the gods. In the end they sealed their own fate by adopting the latter course, and Odysseus and his men were later able to pour forth from it to sack the city.¹⁵⁹ Odysseus tells how he was stationed to open and close the trap-door, and how many of the men shook with fear as they climbed in.¹⁶⁰ Homer also adds a peculiar detail to the story, reporting that Helen walked around it calling to the men inside by name, imitating the voices of their wives; but although Diomedes and Menelaos were tempted to reply, they were restrained by Odysseus, who also put his hand over the mouth of a certain Anticlos, otherwise unknown, to prevent him from speaking out. Such is the strange tale recounted in the *Odyssey* by Menelaos, who conjectures that his wife’s caprice must have been inspired by some god who favoured the Trojans.¹⁶¹

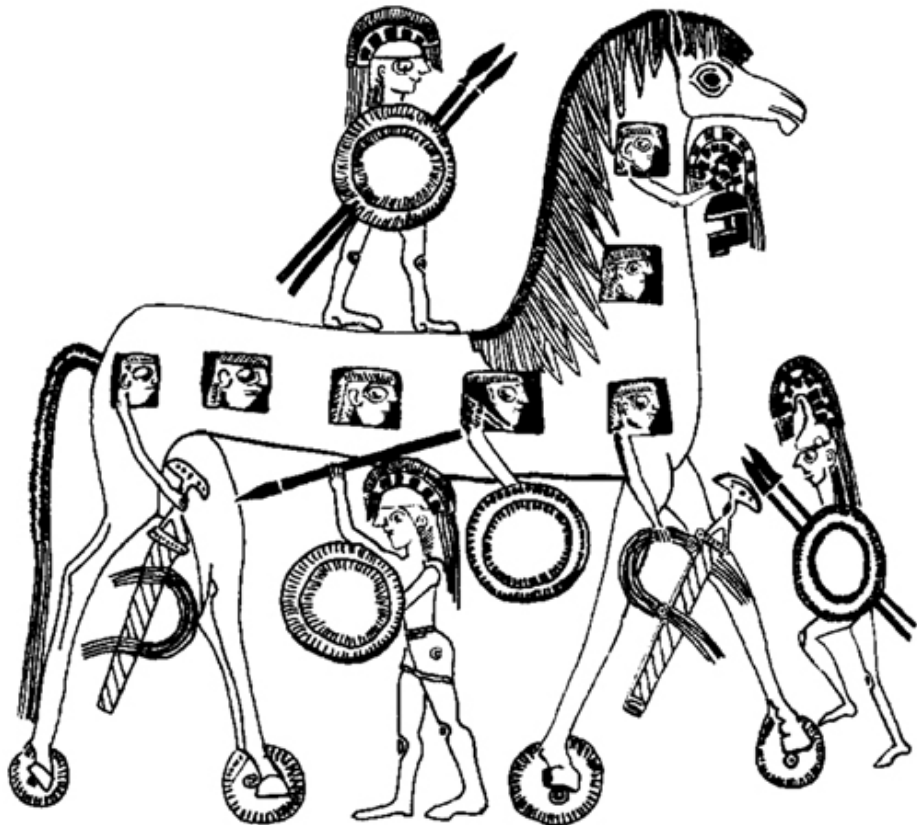


Figure 21.6. The Wooden Horse. Drawing after an archaic vase.

Estimates of the number of the troops who were hidden in the Horse vary in later sources from twelve to fifty or a hundred, and it is made plain that they were intended to serve merely as an advance guard, who would open the city gates to the main force if the Trojans dragged the Horse into the city. For the Greek fleet was waiting off the coast by the island of Tenedos in the meantime, watching out for the signal that would summon it back. The story was told in that way in the *Little Iliad*, in which the Trojans took the Horse into their city as in the *Odyssey*, pulling down part of the city wall to allow its entry; when the Trojans were then feasting, in the belief that they had defeated the enemy, the Greek fleet was summoned back by a man called Sinon, who lit a signal-fire for that purpose at midnight as the bright moon was rising.¹⁶²

The next epic in the Trojan cycle, the *Sack of Troy*, also offered an account of this episode, for which we have a somewhat fuller summary. The Trojans were suspicious of the Horse, and discussed what would be the best course of action, much as in the *Odyssey*, debating whether they should hurl it down from the rocks, or burn it, or else dedicate it to Athena, as they finally decided to do. The priest Laocoon, who would play such an important part in later accounts, is now introduced into the story. As the Trojans were feasting, thinking that the war was now at an end, two serpents appeared and killed Laocoon and one of his two sons; and Aineias and his

followers were so alarmed by this portent that they withdrew to Mt Ida. The meaning of the portent is by no means hard to interpret, the death of Laocoon indicated the impending fall of the city, while the death of his son (doubtless the elder) pointed to the destruction of Priam's senior branch of the Trojan royal family; so by withdrawing, Aineias, as the leading representative of the junior branch, would survive to take over. Sinon then raised his fire-signal as usual to recall the fleet, after having previously entered the city 'through a pretence'.¹⁶³

It is recorded in later sources, quite possibly in accordance with the early epic tradition, that the Greeks encouraged the Trojans to regard the Horse as a sacred object by carving an inscription on to it, which stated that it was a thank-offering to Athena for their safe return.¹⁶⁴

When compared to these early accounts of the stratagem of the Horse, the versions offered in the *Aeneid* and late Greek epic are significantly different in two main respects. In the first place, the Trojans are far more suspicious of the Horse and therefore argue about what they should do with it before removing it from its original position; and, second, the Greeks appreciate that the Trojans will be suspicious and thus arrange for SINON to be captured by them in circumstances that will enable him to convince them that the Horse presents no danger and should be taken into the city. Sinon already appears in early epic, as we have seen, but primarily or exclusively as the man who is lit the signal to recall the fleet. It does seem, however, that he employed some sort of pretence to get into the city in the *Sack of Troy*, presumably by pretending to have quarrelled with the Greeks (or not to be Greek at all), and that may have provided the starting-point for these later developments. For what it is worth, he is described in late sources as a son of Sisypheos or as a grandson of Autolykos (and thus a cousin of Odysseus) in late sources, in genealogies that were merely invented to connect him with notable figures who were famed for their cunning.¹⁶⁵

In Vergil's narrative, the Trojans conduct a heated debate in front of the Horse before Sinon appears on the scene, some arguing that they should haul it into the city, while others urge that they should beware of any gift from the Greeks and should therefore destroy it, or at least break it open to see whether anything is hidden inside. The priest Laocoon now assumes a new role by taking the lead in advancing the latter view, and almost proves his point by thrusting his spear into the side of the Horse, causing it to echo within; but at that very moment, Sinon, who has been captured in accordance with the Greek plan, is brought forward for questioning. He claims to have been on bad terms with the other Greeks ever since he had vowed to avenge the unjust killing of Palamedes (see p. 471), and alleges that Odysseus had plotted his death by persuading the seer Calchas to declare that he should be sacrificed to ensure the safe departure of the Greek fleet; and as soon as the Trojans are convinced by his story and are ready to believe that he hates his former comrades, they listen trustingly to what he has to say about the Wooden Horse. He tells them that the Greeks built the Horse on the advice of Calchas to expiate for their sacrilege in having stolen Athena's cultic image, the Palladion; and if the Trojans should harm this sacred object, they would be sure to suffer a terrible destruction, but they could expect a splendid destiny on the other hand if they were

to bring it into their city. So they resolve to do so, and they feel that their decision is confirmed when Laocoon and his two sons are killed shortly afterwards by two snakes that swim over from Tenedos; for they interpret this as indicating that the gods are angry with Laocoon for having desecrated the sacred object. When the Horse is inside the walls, the prophetess Cassandra adds her own warnings, but to no effect since she is fated always to be disbelieved (see p. 148).¹⁶⁶ Sinon adopted tougher means to win the trust of the Trojans in the late Greek epic of Quintus of Smyrna, by keeping silent for a considerable time as they tortured him and cut off his ears and nose, and so giving them cause to believe that they had forced the truth out of him.¹⁶⁷ Or, in another late epic by Tryphiodorus, Sinon mutilates himself to make his story seem more credible.¹⁶⁸

Widely differing accounts are offered of the fate of LAOCOON and his sons and of its significance. By contrast to the version in the *Sack of Troy*, in which the incident with the snakes is a portent that induces Aineias and his followers to leave the city, the snakes seem to act by divine will for quite another purpose in Vergil's narrative, to ensure that Laocoon's warning about the Horse will be discounted; and it is explicitly stated in Quintus' late epic that Athena sent the snakes with that intent, after having first turned Laocoon blind.¹⁶⁹ Both of Laocoon's sons are killed in these two accounts. In Apollodorus' version, in which Laocoon comes to the support of Athena when she asserts that the Horse contains a hidden danger, the snakes are said to be sent by Apollo 'as a sign' after the Horse has been brought into the city;¹⁷⁰ but no indication is given of the meaning or consequences of the sign (doubtless because the text is preserved only in summary form at this point). The snakes were said to have come from some neighbouring islands of uncertain identity, the Calydnai. The fifth century poet Bacchylides already said as much, apparently stating that they turned into human form on their arrival.¹⁷¹

In versions of a wholly different kind, first recorded in Roman mythographical sources, the snakes were sent by Apollo to punish Laocoon for behaving in a manner inappropriate to a priest, whether by having intercourse with his wife in front of the divine images in the precinct of Apollo, or by marrying and fathering children against the will of Apollo.¹⁷² Although Laocoon was primarily the priest of Thymbraian Apollo, some authors, including Vergil and the Hellenistic poet Euphorion, state that he was chosen by lot to become the priest of Poseidon at some stage (for the original priest had been stoned to death by the Trojans for failing to offer the proper sacrifices to avert the Greek landing).¹⁷³ In late sources he is described as a son of Aineias' grandfather Capys or of the Trojan elder Antenor.¹⁷⁴

The sack of Troy

In the depth of the night, while the Trojans were asleep after celebrating their apparent victory, the Greeks put their plan into effect. Sinon lit a beacon-fire in the city (or on the tomb of Achilles by the shore) to recall the fleet from Tenedos and guide it on its way;¹⁷⁵ and the warriors who had been waiting inside the Wooden Horse opened the trap-door and slipped down to the ground on ladders or a rope.¹⁷⁶ Or, in Vergil's account, which portrays the events of the night through Aineias' eyes

and often departs from the early epic tradition, Helen recalled the fleet by raising a torch from the citadel; and as the fleet was sailing over from Tenedos, a fire-signal was lit on the king's ship as a cue to Sinon, who then removed some planks from the Wooden Horse to release the warriors from their confinement.¹⁷⁷ Whatever the exact course of the preceding events, the warriors from the Horse killed the sentries and anyone who might have raised the alarm, and then opened the city gates to admit the main force (if this was necessary, for in some accounts, as mentioned above, the walls had already been breached by the Trojans to allow for the entry of the Horse). All the Greek troops were now able to join together to slaughter the unsuspecting Trojans.

No full early account has survived of the course of events on the night of the sack, even if continuous narratives from a later period can be found in book 2 of the *Aeneid* and book 13 of Quintus' *Posthomerica*. We will concentrate on the fates of the most prominent Trojans, as these would have been presented in the early epic tradition in particular. Pausanias' description of Polygnotos' great mural of the sack of Troy, which was painted in the mid-fifth century BC, may be consulted for further information on how prominent individuals from both sides would have fared on that night in early accounts.¹⁷⁸

In the standard account from the *Sack of Troy* in the epic cycle, Neoptolemos forced his way into the palace and killed **Priam** with his lance as the king was seeking sanctuary at the altar of Zeus Herkeios in the central courtyard.¹⁷⁹ The *Little Iliad* presented the episode somewhat differently, suggesting that Neoptolemos dragged him away from the altar and killed him at the doorway of the palace.¹⁸⁰ There are also later accounts in which the young hero decapitated him or hauled him out of the city to slaughter him on the grave of Achilles;¹⁸¹ and in Vergil's portrayal, he killed a surviving son of his, Polites, in front of him before putting him to the sword.¹⁸² Menelaos for his part went to the house of Priam's son **Deiphobos** to recover his errant wife **Helen**, for she had been living with him since the death of Paris (see p. 481). According to the *Odyssey*, he was accompanied by Odysseus, who became embroiled in a desperate fight there, but finally prevailed with the help of Athena.¹⁸³ His presence is not mentioned, however, in the surviving summary of the *Sack of Troy*, which merely states that Menelaos found Helen and took her back to the ship after killing Deiphobos.¹⁸⁴ In the *Little Iliad*, he had apparently been intending to kill Helen, but cast his sword away after catching a glimpse of naked breasts, and it is stated similarly elsewhere that the sight of her divine beauty deterred the Greek troops from stoning her as they had planned, or from putting her to the sword.¹⁸⁵ In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas saw her hiding in the temple of Hestia (Vesta in Latin form) and would have killed her if his divine mother Aphrodite (Venus), who was also Helen's protectress, had not prevented him.¹⁸⁶ Theseus' mother **Aithra**, who had been obliged to attend Helen as a maidservant (see p. 315), was recovered by Demophon and Akamas, the two sons of Theseus, who gained permission from Agamemnon to take her away, see further on p. 316.

Andromache, the widow of Hector, was seized by Neoptolemos along with her infant son **Astyanax**. Some surviving lines from the *Little Iliad* describe the grim fate of Astyanax, telling how Neoptolemos snatched him from his nurse, and seizing him

by the feet, hurled down from a tower to fall to a bloody death.¹⁸⁷ As for Andromache, he led her back to the ships and chose her as his prize of war, taking her way with him to his new homeland (see pp. 500ff.). Astyanax was killed by Odysseus, however, in the *Sack of Troy*, again by being hurled down from the city walls;¹⁸⁸ or, in some late accounts, the Greeks discussed his fate at a meeting after the fall of the city, and resolved, with some encouragement from Odysseus, that he should be put to death.¹⁸⁹ His murder was regularly portrayed in vase-paintings, often in conjunction with that of Priam. This was a rational if ruthless measure since it eliminated the only member of the Trojan royal family who might be likely to seek revenge in the future.

Hecuba, the wife of Priam, was seized and taken down to the ships, as were her daughters; of these, only **Cassandra** has a notable story associated with her capture. According to the *Sack of Troy* in the epic cycle, she claimed sanctuary by clinging to a cultic image of Athena, but the lesser Ajax dragged her away by force, pulling the statue from its position as he did so. His fellow warriors were so appalled by his impious behaviour that they would have stoned him if he had not taken refuge in turn at the altar of Athena, presumably in the very same temple where he had committed his act of sacrilege.¹⁹⁰ Athena exacted a terrible vengeance as we will see (pp. 494ff.), causing the death not only of the lesser Ajax but of many of his comrades too as they were sailing home to Greece; these events were described in the next epic in the Trojan cycle, the *Returns*. Later authors heightened the story of Ajax's sacrilege by saying that he raped Cassandra under the statue of the goddess. It is quite possible that this was already stated by Alcaeus (born in the latter part of seventh century BC) but the relevant verb is unfortunately missing from the papyrus.¹⁹¹ The evidence from the visual arts would suggest in any case that this feature of the story was familiar by the sixth century. The first author to speak unequivocally of a rape is Lycophron, who adds that the statue raised its eyes upwards in disgust.¹⁹²



Figure 21.7. Drinking cup (skyphos) with the departure and recovery of Helen; Greek, Late Archaic period about 490 BC, painter Makron, potter Hieron. Boston MFA/Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912.

Something must now be said about the main survivors among the Trojan men. Of the sons of Priam, **Helenos** was already in the Greek camp, having betrayed preconditions for the fall of Troy under a greater or lesser degree of compulsion (see p. 480); he would accompany Neoptolemos to Epirus after the war (see p. 500). In the post-epic tradition at least, Priam had sent his youngest son **Polydoros** abroad in the hope of ensuring his safety, but to no effect since he was murdered by his host (see below, p. 488). **Aineias**, who belonged to a junior branch of the family, left the city before it fell in the earliest tradition, as has already been described, after beholding the fate of Laocoon and his son, but from the classical period onwards he was usually represented as having fled from the city on the night of the sack with his aged father on his back. It was suggested by Xenophon and others that the Greeks allowed him safe passage out of admiration for the piety that he showed in rescuing his father and household gods. This Greek tradition about his conduct on that fateful night provided the model for the Roman characterization of the just and pious Aeneas. The Trojan nobleman **Antenor** was spared along with his family because he had supported the Greek ambassadors when they had tried to negotiate a peaceful settlement at the outbreak of the war (see pp. 467–8). According to different traditions, he went away to Cyrene in Libya, where he was honoured in hero-cult in historical times, or else travelled to north-eastern Italy by way of Thrace with his sons, where he founded the city of Patavium (Padua).¹⁹³

The fate of the Trojan women

After massacring the men of military age, as was the usual practice after the forcible seizure of a city, the Greeks put Troy (or what remained of it) to the torch and went down to their camp by the ships to share out the spoils. The story now focuses on the sad fate of the captive women, in particular those who belonged to the immediate family of Priam.¹⁹⁴ **Hecuba** (Hecabe in Greek), the main wife of Priam, stands out in all versions of the story of the war as a majestic but most unhappy figure who was fated to lose most of her son one after another in battle, and finally to see her husband cut down in the courtyard of his own palace. Nothing is known of how her subsequent fate was described in early epic; for although it is commonly stated in later sources that she was allotted to Odysseus, there is no indication of that in the *Odyssey* or the surviving testimonies on the *Sack of Troy*. She was generally said to have died soon afterwards, while being conveyed across the Hellespont or on its shores, and in most remarkable circumstances too according to the most favoured account, which suggests that she met a swift death after being transformed into a dog and was then buried by the Hellespont at Cynossema (Bitch's Grave), near the entrance to the strait on its European shore.¹⁹⁵ In Euripides' *Hecuba*, which is the earliest securely datable source for the transformation, it is foretold that she will never reach Greece, because she will change into a fiery-eyed dog on the ship that will carry her away, and then climb up its mast and fall to her death in the sea, to be buried at Cynossema.¹⁹⁶ It is clear from the allusive manner in which her fate is described that this must already have been a familiar tale. In subsequent accounts, she is said to have undergone the transformation after leaping into the sea in anguish at the fate of her home city,¹⁹⁷ or while being stoned by the Greeks in response to curses that she had uttered against them¹⁹⁸ (or by the Thracians because she had blinded their king Polymestor,¹⁹⁹ see below, p. 488). Some said that she became a ghost-hound and haunted the lands around the Hellespont, disturbing the people of the area with her howling, or that she became the hound of Hecate.²⁰⁰ In rationalized accounts, by contrast, she was simply stoned like a dog and never underwent any transformation.²⁰¹ The early lyric poet Stesichorus (who said that she had borne Hector to Apollo rather than to Priam) was exceptional in suggesting that Apollo intervened on her behalf, by transferring her to Lycia after the war.²⁰²

In the surviving play by Euripides that bears her name, Odysseus is said to have taken her across the Hellespont to the Thracian Chersonnese, where her attendants discovered the body of her last-born son, POLYDOROS, lying by the shore.²⁰³ Priam had entrusted the young Polydoros to POLYMESTOR, king of Thrace, who had also given the king a quantity of gold to ensure the continuance of his line if Troy should fall.²⁰⁴ Hecuba thus inferred that Polymestor must have killed her son to steal the gold for himself. So, with Agamemnon's permission, she invited him and his sons to come to visit her, and enticed them to enter her tent unguarded by promising to reveal where the ancestral treasures of Priam had been hidden; and she then blinded Polymestor and murdered his sons with the assistance of her women.²⁰⁵ At the end of the play, Polymestor discloses the above-mentioned prophecy about Hecuba's fate, and Agamemnon orders that the blinded king should be marooned on a desert island.

Both in this play and in his *Trojan Women*, Euripides paints a poignant picture of the aftermath of the fall of Troy and of the predicament of the female captives.

The daughters of Priam and Hecabe met with varying fates. Their prophetic daughter **Cassandra**, who had already suffered at the hands of the lesser Ajax during the night of the sack, was awarded to Agamemnon as a prize of war and was murdered by his wife Clytemnestra soon after she arrived in Greece (see p. 514);²⁰⁶ while according to a story that was already recounted in the *Sack of Troy*, **Polyxena** was slaughtered close to home on the grave of Achilles. It is explained in later sources that the ghost of Achilles had demanded that she should be offered to him in this way as his share of the spoils, or as his bride in death, and that the sacrifice was performed by the hero's son, Neoptolemos. Although Sophocles' play on the matter, the *Polyxena*, has been lost, an account of this disturbing episode can be found Euripides' *Hecuba*, in which a herald describes how she courageously offered her throat to the knife. The idea that the sacrifice was a sort of forced marriage first appears in the Hellenistic period, in Lycophron. Seneca states more explicitly that Achilles wanted Polyxena as his posthumous wife in the Elysian Fields.²⁰⁷ To return to early epic, the *Cypria* offered an account of her fate that apparently differed from that in the *Sack of Troy* and the standard later tradition, by saying that she was fatally wounded by Odysseus and Diomedes during the capture of the city, and was buried afterwards by Neoptolemos.²⁰⁸ It is not clear why this poem, which was concerned with the outbreak and earlier years of the war, should have had anything to say about this matter. Revisionist mythographers of the Roman period have much to say about Polyxena, suggesting that Achilles fell in love with her, and perhaps she too with him, before the fall of the city. Achilles fell in love with her in one account when he saw her during a pause in the fighting, and incurred his own death by seeking to win her as his wife; for Paris and Deiphobos took advantage of the negotiations to murder him in the shrine of Thymbraian Apollo just outside the city.²⁰⁹ Or, according to Philostratus, Polyxena accompanied Priam when he visited the Greek camp to seek the return of Hector's body, and she conceived such a love for Achilles on that occasion that she stole out of the city after his death and stabbed herself on his grave.²¹⁰

According to a tale first reported by Lycophron, another daughter of Priam, **Laodice**, was swallowed up in a chasm in the earth near the tomb of her ancestor Ilos. Quintus explains in his late epic that she prayed to the gods to meet with this fate so as to be spared the indignity of enslavement.²¹¹ The *Iliad* refers to her as the most beautiful of the daughters of Priam, and mentions that she was married to Helicaon, son of Antenor. It is quite possible that her connection with the family of Antenor saved her from enslavement in early epic, especially in view of the fact that Odysseus was presented in the *Little Iliad* as having saved her husband during the sack.²¹² For a Hellenistic love story that claimed that she had previously borne a son to Acamas, son of Theseus, see p. 317. In all but the earliest traditions, Aineias was said to have been married to **Creousa**, daughter of Priam. Polygnotos portrayed her among the Trojan captives in his painting of the sack,²¹³ while subsequent literary accounts disagree on whether she escaped with her husband or was left behind. In the best-known version in the *Aeneid*, Aineias was distressed to find that she had

become separated from him as they were fleeing from the burning city, and went back to look for her; but her ghost appeared to him to tell him that she had been held back by the Mother of the Gods, and that it was the will of the gods that he should travel abroad without her.²¹⁴ Or, according to Lycophron, the Greeks allowed him to depart and to select something to take with him, and he chose to take his father and household gods rather than his wife, children, and property; or else he escaped during the sack with his wife and children too.²¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Proclus on *Cypria*, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.6.
- 2 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 3 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.6.
- 4 Hom. *Il.* 2.299–330, Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 5 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.10.
- 6 Schol. Lyc. 570, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.10 (wife of Anios not named).
- 7 Lyc. 569–83 with schol. 570 (quoting Pherecydes = 3F140, and claiming that some such story was recounted in the *Cypria* = fr. 19 Davies).
- 8 Schol. Lyc. 581, schol. *Od.* 6.164 respectively.
- 9 Dictys 1.23, Serv. *Aen.* 3.80.
- 10 Schol. Lyc. 570.
- 11 Schol. Lyc. 580.
- 12 Verg. *Aen.* 3.78–124, Ov. *Met.* 13.631ff.
- 13 Proclus on *Cypria*, Pi. *Isth.* 8.48–51, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.17, schol. *Il.* 1.59.
- 14 Proclus on *Cypria*, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.18.
- 15 Hom. *Il.* 24.765–6.
- 16 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 17 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.19–20, Hyg. *Fab.* 101 (fuller narrative), Propertius 2.1.63–4 (mode of cure first recorded).
- 18 Eur. *Telephos* ffr, scene from that play mocked in Arist. *Acharn.* 430ff.
- 19 Hyg. *Fab.* 101.
- 20 Hyg. 1.c (married to Laodice, daughter of Priam), Apollod. *Epit.* 3.20 (reveals route, the seer Calchas confirms the accuracy of his directions).
- 21 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 22 Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 1–30; killed, e.g. Pi. *Pyth.* 11.22–3, Aesch. *Ag.* 228ff; see also Soph. *Electra* 563–76, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.21–2, Hyg. *Fab.* 98, Ov. *Met.* 12.24–38.
- 23 Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 20–4.
- 24 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.21–2, 2.10.
- 25 Serv. *Aen.* 2.116, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 98.
- 26 This is of course central to the plot of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, cf. Pi. *Pyth.* 11.17–25.
- 27 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.23–5, Paus. 10.14.2; cf. Lyc. 232–9 with schol. 232, Conon 28, D.S. 5.83, schol. *Il.* 1.38.
- 28 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.26; Proclus on *Cypria* merely states that the Greeks sailed to Tenedos.
- 29 Plut. *Quaest. Gr.* 28.
- 30 Lyc. 240–2 with schol; on mother's warning, cf. Plut. *Quaest. Gr.* 28, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.26.
- 31 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 32 Soph. *Philoct.* 263–70, 1326–8.
- 33 Euripides' *Philoctetes* as reported in Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 59.
- 34 Paus. 8.33.4; Homeric Chryse, *Il.* 1.37, 100. See also Appian *Mithridat.* 77.
- 35 Schol. *Il.* 2.722, schol. Soph. *Philoct.* 194.
- 36 Hyg. *Fab.* 102.
- 37 Schol. Lyc. 911, schol. Soph. *Philoct.* 194.
- 38 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.27; ill-omened cries. Soph. *Philoct.* 8–11, 1032–4; how he fed himself on island, *ibid.* 164–7, 287–92, 706–11; Lemnos uninhabited, Soph. *Philoct.* 2.
- 39 Serv. *Aen.* 3.402, Vat. *Myth.* 1.59.
- 40 Killed by Dardanian, Hom. *Il.* 2.695–702; killed by Hector, Proclus on *Cypria*, Soph. *Poimenes* fr. 455 Nauck, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.29–30. See also Lyc. 526–33 with scholia.

- 41 Hyg. *Fab.* 103.
- 42 *Cypria* fr. 18 Davies (from Paus. 4.2.7).
- 43 Report on Euripides' *Protesilaos*, Nauck p. 563 (from a scholion to Aristides, vol. 3, p. 671 Dindorf).
- 44 Hyg. *Fab.* 103.
- 45 *Ibid.* 104.
- 46 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.30. From the Roman literature, see also Ov. *Heroides* 13 (a letter written by Laodameia).
- 47 Over corn, Hes. fr. 62, over sea, schol. A.R. 1.45 citing Demaratos.
- 48 Nestor considers it a feat to have once beaten him in a foot-race, Hom. *Il.* 23.636; Podarces his son, 2.704–5.
- 49 For his fatal encounter with the Amazons, Quint. Smyrn. 1.233ff, 815ff.
- 50 Apollod. 1.9.4; Phylacos as founder of Phylace, Steph. Byz. s.v. Phylake, schol. *Il.* 2.69.
- 51 Schol. A.R. 1.45; already mentioned as father of Iphiclos, Hom. *Il.* 2.705, 13.698; as father of Alcimedea, Pher. 3F104, A.R. 1.45–7.
- 52 Hes. fr. 237, Hellenic. 4F148.
- 53 Athen. 393b.
- 54 Proclus on *Cypria*, Arist. *Rhetoric* 2.24, 1396b 16–18, Soph. *Poimenes* fr. 500 Radt.
- 55 Pi. *Ol.* 2.82, *Isth.* 5.39, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.31.
- 56 Ov. *Met.* 12.70–140.
- 57 Proclus on *Cypria*, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.31.
- 58 Hom. *Il.* 3.146ff.
- 59 *Ibid.* 3.203–24, 11.138–42, schol. *Il.* 3.205–6, Proclus on *Cypria* (embassy sent after landing), Bacch 15, Hdt. 2.118 (with unconventional matter), Apollod. *Epit.* 3.28–9 (sent before landing).
- 60 Hom. *Il.* 11.122–47.
- 61 Str. 13.1.53 citing Sophocles, Paus. 10.27.2 (in Polygnotos' painting of the sack of Troy), schol. *Il.* 3.205–6.
- 62 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.46, Serv. *Aen.* 2.15, schol. Lyc. 340; Tzetz. Lyc. 658 (Palladion).
- 63 Hom. *Il.* 21.544–611.
- 64 *Little Iliad* fr. 18 Davies (from Paus. 10.27.1), cf. Q.S. 13.213–17.
- 65 Hom. *Il.* 18.251–2.
- 66 *Ibid.* 16.805–17, 17.1–60.
- 67 Paus. 2.17.3.
- 68 Diogenes Laertius 8.4–5.
- 69 Hom. *Il.* 24.255–7.
- 70 *Ibid.* 6.392–496; Pl. *Ion* 535b.
- 71 Hom. *Il.* 20.407–18.
- 72 Incident mentioned in Proclus on *Cypria*; on the miseries suffered by the troops, Aesch. *Ag.* 558–72; see also the comments of Thucydides, 1.11.
- 73 Hom. *Il.* 9.128–30 (sack of Lesbos), 2.690–3 (Lyrnessos and Hypoplacian Thebes), Proclus on *Cypria* (Lyrnessos, Pedasos and many neighbouring cities), Apollod. *Epit.* 3.32–3 (Clazomenae, Smyrna, Colophon, etc.), schol. *Il.* 6.35. Eustath. on *Il.* 2.690.
- 74 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 75 Hom. *Il.* 2.688–93 (Lyrnessos); *ibid.* 1.336–7, 6.414–28 (Thebes).
- 76 *Ibid.* 9.328–9.
- 77 *Ibid.* 128–30.
- 78 Hom. *Il.* 24.257, cf. Proclus on *Cypria* ('Achilles kills Troilos'), Ibycus 282a.41–5 (beauty of T.), schol. *Il.* 24.257 citing Sophocles (T. ambushed while exercising horses near Thymbraion); see also Apollod. *Epit.* 3.32 (A. ambushed T. and slaughtered him in the sanctuary of Thymbraian Apollo).
- 79 Lyc. 307–13 with schol. 307.
- 80 Vat. Myth. 1.210 and Plaut. *Bacchides* 953–5 respectively.
- 81 It first appears in the *Roman de Troie* of Benoit de Sainte-More (12th century); Chaucer followed the version in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*.
- 82 Hom. *Il.* 21.34–135, 23.740–7; Proclus on *Cypria* (Patroclus took Lycaon to Lemnos).
- 83 Hom. *Il.* 7.161–80.
- 84 See e.g. Gorgias *Palamedes* 30, schol. Eur. *Orest.* 432, Soph. fr. 429, 432 Radt; Serv. *Aen.* 2.81 (draughts as diversion for troops).
- 85 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 86 Hyg. *Fab.* 95.
- 87 E.g. schol. Lyc. 384.
- 88 Hyg. l.c., Apollod. *Epit.* 3.7, schol. Lyc. 384, 815, Serv. *Aen.* 2.81, Vat. Myth. 1.35.

- 89 *Cypria* fr. 20 Davies (from Paus. 10.31.1).
- 90 Hyg. *Fab.* 105, cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 3.8, Vat. Myth. 1.35.
- 91 Schol. Eur. *Orest.* 432.
- 92 Dictys 2.15.
- 93 Hom. *Il.* Book 1.
- 94 Ibid. Book 5 (Diomedes dominates)–7 (434ff, Greeks make ditch and wall).
- 95 Ibid. Book 8.
- 96 Ibid. Book 9.
- 97 Ibid. Book 11.
- 98 Ibid. Books 12–15.
- 99 Ibid. Book 16.
- 100 Ibid. Books 17–18.
- 101 Ibid. Books 19–22; death and defilement of Hector in 22.
- 102 Ibid. Book 23.
- 103 Ibid. Book 24.
- 104 Ibid. 2.819ff.
- 105 A translation is conveniently available in the Loeb series, as also of the shorter *Capture of Troy* by Tryphiodorus.
- 106 Hom. *Il.* 10.435, as against Eur. *Rhes.* 387–8, Apollod. 1.3.4.
- 107 Hom. *Il.* 10.423–514.
- 108 Eur. *Rhes.* 600ff, schol. *Il.* 10.435, Verg. *Aen.* 469–73 with Servius on p. 469.
- 109 Pi. fr. 262 SM in schol. *Il.* cit.
- 110 Q.S. 1.18ff (accidentally killed sister Hippolyte while aiming spear at a boar), cf. D.S. 2.46.5 (killed relative), Apollod. *Epit.* 5.1 (killed Hippolyte; in 5.2, this Hippolyte is wrongly identified with the Amazon abducted by Theseus, an absurdity in chronological terms); Hellanic. 4F149 (Amazon came to win glory).
- 111 Proclus on *Aethiopsis*, cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 5.1, Q.S. Book 1.
- 112 Hom. *Il.* 6.186, 3.184–9.
- 113 Proclus on *Aethiopsis*, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.1, Lyc. 999–1001 with schol. (Thersites gouged out eye), Q.S. 1.718–81, schol. Soph. *Philoct.* 445, Eustath. on *Il.* 2.219.
- 114 Hom. *Il.* 2.211–77.
- 115 Q.S. 1.766ff.
- 116 Hom. *Il.* 2.216–9 (deformed state), Pher. 3F123 (thrown over cliff), schol. *Il.* 2.212 citing Euphorion (chased over cliff).
- 117 E.g. Hdt. 5.54 (Susa as city of Memnon), D.S. 2.22 following Ctesias (Susa); cf. Str. 15.3.2 (also citing Simonides = 539 PMG, for burial in Syria).
- 118 E.g. Paus. 1.42.2.
- 119 Hom. *Od.* 4.186–8 and 11.522 respectively.
- 120 Pi. *Pyth.* 6.28–42.
- 121 Q.S. 2.549ff.
- 122 Q.S. 2.642–50, Serv. *Aen.* 1.751, Dionys. *Av.* 1.8.
- 123 Ov. *Met.* 13.576–622.
- 124 Proclus on *Aethiopsis*, Hom. *Il.* 22.358–60.
- 125 Pindar *Paean* 6.75ff; Apollod. *Epit.* 5.3–4; Apollo alone, Hyg. *Fab.* 107, Q.S. 3.26–66; Paris alone mentioned, Eur. *Androm.* 655, *Hecuba.* 387–8; Apollo guides hand of Paris, Verg. *Aen.* 6.56–8.
- 126 Proclus on *Aethiopsis*.
- 127 Proclus on *Aethiopsis*, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.4; Hom. *Od.* 24.43–94, cf. Q.S. 3.380–787.
- 128 Hom. *Od.* 11.467ff; *ibid.* *ibid.* 489–91 (rather be serf in world above).
- 129 Pi. *Ol.* 2.142–3; married posthumously to Medeia, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.5, A.R. 4.811–15 with schol. 814 citing Ibycus and Simonides as first to offer story.
- 130 To Iphigeneia, schol. *Il.* 19.326, Ant. Lib. 27 (Iphigeneia as Orsilochia); to Polyxena, Seneca *Troad.* 954.
- 131 Hom. *Od.* 11.544–56, with schol. 547 (Trojan captives), cf. Q.S. 5.157ff.
- 132 Hom. *Od.* 11.548–9.
- 133 *Little Iliad* fr. 2A Davies.
- 134 Pi. *Nem.* 8.26–7, cf. 7.23–30.
- 135 Proclus on *Little Iliad*.
- 136 Pi. *Isth.* 4.35–6.
- 137 Soph. *Ajax*, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.6–7, cf. Q.S. 5.
- 138 *Little Iliad* fr. 3 Davies, cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 5.7.

- 139 Soph. *Ajax* 1047–1373.
140 Soph. *Ajax* 530ff, 982ff, Q.S. 5.521ff.
141 Pi. *Nem.* 4.46, Eur. *Helen* 87–104; cf. Soph. *Ajax* 1008–20 (Teucros suspects that his father will banish him).
142 Serv. *Aen.* 1.619.
143 Proclus on *Little Iliad*.
144 Apollod. *Epit.* 5.8–11.
145 See Lyc. 52–6 with schol. 52.
146 Paus. 5.13.4–6.
147 Paus. 5.13.4–6.
148 Proclus on *Little Iliad*.
149 Paus. 9.5.8, Q.S. 7.104f.
150 Hom. *Od.* 11.520–1.
151 Acus. 2F40.
152 *Little Iliad* fr. 29 Bernabe.
153 Schol. *Od.* 11.521.
154 Proclus on *Little Iliad* with fr. 8 Davies.
155 Hom. *Od.* 4.242–58.
156 Apollod. *Epit.* 5.13.
157 Soph. fr. 367 Radt, Serv. *Aen.* 2.166.
158 Conon 34, Zenob s.v., Serv. *Aen.* 2.166; *Little Iliad* fr. 9 Davies.
159 Hom. *Od.* 492–520.
160 Ibid. 11.523–7.
161 Hom. *Od.* 4.271–89, cf. Tryph. 463–90.
162 Proclus on *Little Iliad* with fr. 11 Davies (fire-signal).
163 Proclus on *Sack of Troy*.
164 Apollod. *Epit.* 5.15.
165 Lyc 344 with schol.
166 Verg. *Aen.* 2.1–249.
167 Q.S. 12.218ff (capture and torture of Sinon, 360–422).
168 Tryph. 227ff.
169 Q.S. 12.444ff, blinds him, 395ff; for the death of Laocoon and his sons in Verg. *Aen.*, see 2.199–33.
170 Apollod. *Epit.* 5.18.
171 Bacch. fr. 9 SM, cf. schol. Lyc. 347 (from Calydnai).
172 Serv. *Aen.* 2.201 and Hyg. *Fab.* 135 respectively.
173 Verg. *Aen.* 2.201, with Servius ad loc. citing Euphorion.
174 Hyg. *Fab.* 135 (corrected from Acoetes) and Tzetz. Lyc. 347 respectively.
175 *Little Iliad* fr. 11 Davies (at midnight, as the clear moon was rising), Proclus on *Sack of Troy* (lit fire-signal after entering the city by a pretence), Apollod. *Epit.* 5.19 and Tryph. 510–11 (on tomb of Achilles), Q.S. 13.21–9.
176 E.g. Apollod. *Epit.* 5.20 (on rope after first to leave, Echion, son of Portheus, was killed when jumping), Verg. *Aen.* 2.262 (rope), Q.S. 13.306–60 (on ladder constructed by Epeios).
177 Verg. *Aen.* 6.515–19 (Helen's signal), 2.254–9 (Sinon).
178 Paus. 10.25–27.
179 Proclus on *Sack of Troy*, Eur. *Hecuba* 22–4, *Troades* 16–17, 481–4, Apollod. *Epit.* 6.21, Paus. 4.17.4.
180 *Little Iliad* fr. 11A Davies.
181 Decapitated, Verg. *Aen.* 2.557 with Servius on ibid. 506–7 and 557, Q.S. 13.220–50; on grave of Achilles, Serv. *Aen.* 557.
182 Verg. *Aen.* 2.526–58; cf. Q.S. 13.214 (Neoptolemos kills Polites when attacked by him in the course of the fighting).
183 Hom. *Od.* 517–20.
184 Proclus on *Sack of Troy*.
185 *Little Iliad* fr. 19 Davies and Stes. 201 respectively. See also Eur. *Androm.* 627–31 for former story, with schol. ibid. 628 (ascribing it to Ibycus also).
186 Verg. *Aen.* 2.567–93.
187 *Little Iliad* fr. 23 Davies (from Paus. 10.25.2).
188 Proclus on *Sack of Troy* with fr. 4 Davies.
189 Eur. *Troad.* 719–39, 433–5. On the fate of Astyanax, see also Eur. *Androm.* 8–11, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.23, Q.S.

- 13.252–7 (killed by Greeks on night of sack); allusion to possible fate, Hom. *Il.* 24.734–5.
- 190 Proclus on *Sack of Troy*, cf. Paus. 5.19.5 (as depicted on chest of Cypselos).
- 191 Alcaeus 262.
- 192 Lyc. 357–64, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.22, Q.S. 13.420–9; Vergil, *Aen.* 2.402–6, makes no mention of the rape.
- 193 Schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 5.83, Serve. *Aen.* 1.246, Pliny N.H. 3.19.
- 194 See e.g. Eur. *Troad.*, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.23.
- 195 On tomb, Str. 13.1.28, D.S. 13.40.
- 196 Eur. *Hecuba.* 1260–75.
- 197 Nicander fr. 62.
- 198 Lyc. 330–4, 1174–88 with scholia, Vat. Myth. 3.9.8.
- 199 Ov. *Met.* 13.565–71, Vat. Myth. 2.209.
- 200 Anon. lyric. fr. 965 *PMG*, Lyc. 1176 respectively.
- 201 E.g. schol. Lyc. 315.
- 202 Stes. 198.
- 203 Eur. *Hec.* 678ff, body brought to Hecuba.
- 204 Ibid. 1ff.
- 205 Hekabe's confrontation with Polymestor and sons, Eur. *Hec.* 953ff.
- 206 Already in Hom. *Od.* 11.421–2.
- 207 Proclus on *Sack of Troy*, Eur. *Hec.* 35–44 (ghost of Achilles demands her sacrifice if Greeks are to sail), 93–5, cf. 107–15, 309–10 (as his share of the spoils), 534–8, Lyc. 323–9 (his bride in death), Ov. *Met.* 13.439ff, Seneca *Troad.* 938–44, 1118–64, Q.S. 14.214ff.
- 208 *Cypria* fr. 27 Davies.
- 209 Hyg. *Fab.* 110; the story is developed at length in Dictys 3–5.
- 210 Philostr. *Her.* 20.18; *Vit. Apoll.* 4.16.4.
- 211 Lyc. 314–18, 496–8, Apollod. *Epit.* 5.23, Q.S. 13.544–51, Tryph. 660–3.
- 212 Hom. *Il.* 3.121–4, *Little Iliad* fr. 13 Davies (from Paus. 10.26.2).
- 213 Paus. 10.26.1.
- 214 Verg. *Aen.* 2.735–94.
- 215 Lyc. 1263–9 and D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.46.2–4 respectively.

The return journeys of the Greek heroes

The stories of the return journeys (*nostoi*) of the Greeks were recounted in a special epic in the Trojan cycle, the *Nostoi* or *Returns*. A central theme of this epic was the wrath of Athena, which was provoked by an act of sacrilege committed at her shrine by the lesser Ajax during the sack of Troy (see pp. 486–7), and which was directed not only against Ajax himself but also against the Greeks in general, because they had failed to punish him. The goddess began by sowing discord in the Greek camp, provoking a quarrel between Agamemnon and Menelaos that would cause them to return home separately with different sections of the Greek army; and she then sent a dreadful storm against Agamemnon's section of the fleet. As a result of this storm and of other perils, some heroes were killed while others were driven far off course; but in the early epic tradition at least, most of the leaders arrived home safely after falling into greater or lesser danger on the way. There were a few who avoided the perils of the sea altogether by travelling by land. We will start by considering how the different sections of the fleet fared, according to the pattern established in early epic, and then pass on to the stories of those who travelled by land, and of those who were said to have ended up in Italy in the later tradition. The lengthy travels of Odysseus will require separate treatment after that, as will the murder of Agamemnon and all that followed from it.

Five heroes above all have particularly interesting stories associated with their returns. Odysseus wandered far abroad into strange realms and distant seas, as recounted in the second of the Homeric epics, whereas the brutal lesser Ajax met his death soon after his departure from Troy. Neoptolemos, the son of the dead Achilles, travelled overland on the advice of his divine grandmother Thetis and settled in Epirus, on the north-western fringes of Greece, with Hector's widow as his concubine and Helen's daughter as his wife. Agamemnon for his part reached home safely, only to be murdered by his wife (or her lover) on arriving in Argos, while his brother Menelaos was driven far off course by a storm and tarried in Egypt for several years, and so did not set foot in the Peloponnese until after Agamemnon's murder had been avenged by his son Orestes. As we have already seen (pp. 422ff.), this cycle of intrafamilial conflict and vengeance was nothing exceptional in the history of Agamemnon's family, the Pelopids, and the last stages of that history will form the

subject of the final part of this chapter.

The returns of the Greeks

Athena's wrath at the sacrilege of the lesser Ajax, and its implications for the Greek returns

Of all the deeds that were committed by the Greeks during the sack of Troy, none was considered more shameful than the lesser Ajax's act of sacrilege in seizing Cassandra from her place of sanctuary in the temple of Athena, and even raping her by the altar in some accounts (see p. 487). It was indicated at the end of the *Sack of Troy*, the epic poem that provided the earliest known account of this story, that Athena planned to bring disaster to the Greeks at sea,¹ plainly because she was angered by this sacrilege, which had gone unpunished as we have already seen. The resulting theme of the wrath of Athena is already in evidence in Nestor's account of the Greek returns in the *Odyssey*, and it was central to the plot of the *Returns* (even if neither the *Odyssey* nor the surviving testimonies on the *Returns* make any explicit mention of the cause of the goddess's anger).

Even before the Greek force was ready to depart, Athena incited its two main leaders to quarrel over the best course of action, Agamemnon arguing that they should delay their departure until they had taken measures to appease the goddess, while his brother Menelaos urged that they should depart immediately. The fleet was divided as a consequence, because Menelaos and those who shared his opinion, including Nestor and Diomedes, set off in advance of Agamemnon and the rest of the army. When Agamemnon subsequently led the others out to sea after offering sacrifices to Athena, he soon had reason to appreciate that the mind of the goddess had not yet been softened, for the fleet was struck by a violent storm in which the lesser Ajax, who had caused the trouble in the first place, met a well-deserved death. Agamemnon escaped, however, and arrived home safely, as did Nestor and Diomedes after setting off previously with Menelaos. Special fates were reserved for Menelaos and Odysseus, whose returns were delayed for a number of years while they wandered in foreign parts.

Thus far the *Returns* was in agreement with the *Odyssey*, but it went beyond the earlier epic by offering an account of two overland journeys, the first within Asia Minor by the seer Calchas and some companions, and the second by Neoptolemos, who travelled by land to northern Greece with Helenos and others. The *Odyssey* makes no mention of the former journey, and it makes only a brief reference to the travels of Neoptolemos, saying that he arrived back safely with the Myrmidons, presumably after making a sea-crossing to his father's land in Thessaly, although this is not explicitly stated. In the *Returns*, however, his divine grandmother Thetis advised him to travel overland, evidently because she was aware that the fleet would be endangered as a result of Athena's anger.²

Menelaos and Agamemnon quarrel at the instigation of Athena, and depart

separately with different sections of the army

Since little is recorded of the *Returns* beyond a brief outline of its plot, we will begin by examining in further detail what Nestor and Menelaos have to say about the returns of the Greeks in the *Odyssey*, and then consider how the story of the great storm was developed in the subsequent tradition. When Telemachos, the son of Odysseus, visits Nestor and Menelaos in the *Odyssey* to seek news of his long-absent father, they have much of interest to say about their own return voyages and the fate of their comrades. Nestor tells him that Zeus had planned a dismal return for the Greeks because not all of them had behaved wisely or righteously (presumably during the sack of the city), and many of them had come to grief accordingly through the wrath of Athena. The goddess had started the mischief by inciting Agamemnon and Menelaos to quarrel immediately after the fall of Troy. The two leaders summoned a meeting of the troops to put forward their opposing views, Menelaos arguing that they should make an immediate departure, and Agamemnon that they should delay until they had offered splendid sacrifices to Athena (little realizing that she would not be appeased by them, for the mind of a god is not turned in a moment). The meeting was an ill-ordered and ill-tempered affair, held at sunset when the troops were befuddled with wine; and no common decision was reached at it since neither brother was able to convince more than part of the audience. So about half of the Greek troops remained behind with Agamemnon, while the rest made an early departure on the following morning.³

Nestor, Diomedes, and Odysseus were among those who set sail first, while **Menelaos** followed shortly afterwards. Those who left in the first group stopped off at the island of Tenedos to offer sacrifices for their safe return, and further dissension arose at this point, which caused some to turn back towards Troy so as to rejoin Agamemnon, following the lead of Odysseus. Nothing more is revealed about the progress of this group of ships until we learn from Odysseus' own narrative later in the epic that he was blown to Thrace with twelve ships, a turn of events that would mark the beginning of his long wanderings, see further on pp. 505ff. Nestor and Diomedes continued their homeward voyage in accordance with the original plan, initially sailing south down the Asian coast. Menelaos was following not far behind and finally caught up with them at the island of Lesbos.⁴

They then sailed directly across the Aegean to Euboea, stopping off at its southern tip to offer sacrifices to Poseidon for their safe passage. Menelaos became separated from the others, however, soon after they set off together from Euboea, because his steersman Phrontis suddenly died as the fleet was approaching the southern tip of Attica, and he thus had to turn aside to bury him on the coast.⁵ This would have the effect of causing his return to be delayed for almost as long as that of Odysseus, although he did not wander as far or have as many colourful adventures. Diomedes for his part arrived home safely in Argos on the fourth day of the voyage, while Nestor sailed on around the southern reaches of the Peloponnese, benefitting from favourable winds until he reached his city of Pylos on the west coast.⁶ In the early tradition, Diomedes resumed power again in Argos after his swift arrival, and lived uneventfully thereafter in the same way as Nestor; it was only later that he came to

represented as meeting with trouble at home, like Agamemnon, and so being forced to set off on further wanderings, see p. 503.

Menelaos is driven to Egypt and remains in the area for eight years

Although some of his ships were wrecked on Crete, Menelaos himself was driven all the way to Egypt with the five surviving ships, and remained in that region for eight years, amassing quantities of treasure.⁷ As he recounts to Telemachos in the *Odyssey*, he had a curious adventure when he finally decided to sail home to Sparta. As he was trying to set out to sea, he was becalmed for twenty days at Pharos, a small island off the Nile delta, until he and his men ran out of supplies and were reduced to catching fish, the very last resort for a Greek warrior. In the end, however, the sea-nymph Eidothea took pity on him and told him to lie in wait for her father Proteus, the old man of the sea, who would be able to provide the advice that he needed. She guided him and three of his companions to the cave in which Proteus used to take his noon-tide siesta among his herds of seals; and she disguised them by wrapping them in freshly cut seal-skins, placing a dab of ambrosia under their noses to counteract the foul stench. They were thus able to catch Proteus by surprise, and they kept a firm grip on him even though he tried to escape by constantly changing his shape, turning first into a lion and then into a snake, a leopard, a boar, and running water and a towering tree. When finally compelled to speak, he revealed that Menelaos and his followers had been held back because they had failed to offer the proper sacrifices to Zeus and the other gods before setting out to sea, and he recommended that they should return to the Nile to rectify the omission. He was also able to tell Menelaos about the fates of Agamemnon, Ajax, and Odysseus, as we will see shortly. On receiving the offerings that were due to them, the gods granted a fair wind to Menelaos to carry him swiftly home; and he arrived to learn that the murder of Agamemnon had just been avenged by his son Orestes.⁸

Although we are told that Menelaos lingered in foreign parts for eight years, wandering through Cyprus and Phoenicia and visiting the Ethiopians and Libyans and other peoples of strange speech, Homer has no specific adventures to report for him until the time of his departure; these long years are essentially a blank.⁹ The tale of his wanderings was evidently invented (quite possibly by Homer himself) for a single purpose, to keep him out of the way until the cycle of vengeance had been completed within Agamemnon's family; for it would otherwise have been hard to explain why Menelaos himself should have failed to take any action over the murder of his brother and the usurpation of the Mycenaean throne.

It hardly needs saying that Menelaos was accompanied on his travels by Helen, his newly recovered wife, and the *Odyssey* refers to various gifts that were received by her during her stay in Egypt, notably some wonder-working drugs and a silver work-basket that ran on wheels.¹⁰ As has been mentioned (see pp. 456–7), there were unorthodox versions of her legend in which she remained in Egypt during the war while a phantom of her accompanied Paris to Troy; in that case, Menelaos was reunited with the true Helen when he visited Egypt after the war, recovering her from Proteus, king of Egypt, or from his violent son and successor Theoclymenos.¹¹

According to a legend that was probably of Hellenistic origin, a certain CANOPOS (or Canobos), the eponym of the city of that name at the Canopic mouth of the Nile, became the new helmsman of Menelaos after the death of Phrontis and steered his ship to Egypt. While he was there, the king's daughter, Theonoe, conceived an unrequited passion for him; and when he died from a snakebite at the mouth of the Nile, just as Menelaos was about to sail home, Menelaos and Helen had him buried at the site of the city of Canopos, which was named after him when it was subsequently founded.¹² The name Canopos was also bestowed on a brilliant star in the southern sky (alpha Carinae), which could not be seen from the Greek mainland but would rise above the horizon as ships sailed south towards Egypt. It has been suggested that, in a lost poem entitled the *Canobos*, Apollonius represented the helmsman as being raised to the sky to become the star, but this cannot be confirmed as more than a conjecture.¹³

Agamemnon's section of the fleet is struck by a great storm; the death of the lesser Ajax; Nauplios the wrecker

Although Menelaos and Nestor could obviously have had no direct knowledge of how Agamemnon's section of the fleet had fared at sea, Menelaos was able to report the essentials to Odysseus' son Telemachos because he had questioned Proteus about the matter. The old man of the sea, who was something of a seer, like other sea-gods of his kind, had declared that only two of the Greek leaders had perished since leaving Troy, the **lesser Ajax** out at sea and **Agamemnon** in his homeland; for Ajax had been shipwrecked and killed by Poseidon, and Agamemnon had been murdered as soon as he had arrived in the Argolid. With regard to Ajax, Proteus had explained that Poseidon had driven him on to the Gyraian Rocks (of uncertain location, see below, p. 498), but had saved him from the sea afterwards; he would thus have survived if he had not foolishly boasted that he had escaped against the will of the gods, gravely angering Poseidon, who had reached for his trident and had split the rock on which he was standing, causing him to be thrown into the sea and drowned.¹⁴ As for Agamemnon, he had escaped the dangers of the sea through the protection of Hera, but had been murdered by his wife's lover, Aigisthos, after setting foot on his native soil.¹⁵ Proteus also revealed that **Odysseus** was still alive, even though he had lost all of his companions and was detained for the present on Calypso's island (see p. 510).¹⁶ Nestor for his part was able to tell Telemachos that he had heard news of the safe returns of **Neoptolemos**, **Philoctetes**, and **Idomoneus** (all of whom had apparently sailed with Agamemnon, although Neoptolemos was said to have travelled overland in the *Returns*, see below, p. 499).¹⁷

The fate of Agamemnon will be considered separately in connection with the later history of the Pelopids. Although he and Odysseus were the only Greek rulers who met with serious trouble at home on their return in the early epic tradition, tales of that kind were developed with regard to Diomedes and Idomoneus too in the Hellenistic era, when they came to be presented as having engaged in further adventures in Italy, see further on p. 503. To reiterate, almost all of the Greek

leaders arrived home safely in the early epic tradition, apparently to resume their normal lives without further event, and none apart from Odysseus and Menelaos were said to have been driven very far off course on the way.

It is not clear from the *Odyssey* whether all the Greeks who had sailed off with Agamemnon were imperilled by a great storm, as was certainly the case in the *Returns*. In the latter epic, the ghost of Achilles appeared to Agamemnon and the others as they were sailing away from Troy, and tried to hold the fleet back by foretelling what would befall them (evidently a storm that would be sent against them as a result of the anger of Athena). The storm descended on them at the Capherides Rocks, causing the death of the lesser Ajax. This bare outline is all that is recorded in the surviving summary of the poem.¹⁸ The rocks were located at Cape Caphareus at the southern tip of Euboea (the long island that skirts the east coast of Central Greece). According to subsequent sources, the great seafarer NAUPLIOS, who had been embittered against the Greeks ever since his son Palamedes had been unjustly killed at Troy (see pp. 471ff.), took advantage of the storm to lure many ships to their destruction. He achieved this by lighting beacon-fires on the headland, causing the sailors to steer towards them in the belief that they were being guided to a safe haven, and so run ashore on the rocks. Cape Caphareus was notorious as a hazard to shipping in any case, as is witnessed in its later name of Xylophagos, 'Eater of Timber'.¹⁹ Although Sophocles and Euripides are the earliest authors who are definitely known to have referred to Nauplios' activities as a wrecker, it is at least possible that he already figured in that role in the *Returns*, since that poem is known to have referred to him in some context, and it located the storm at the appropriate place.²⁰

The location of the Gyraian Rocks, where the lesser Ajax is said to have met his death in the *Odyssey*,²¹ was disputed in later tradition, for some authors placed them at Cape Caphareus in Euboea while others claimed that they lay further south in one of the smaller islands, either Myconos or Tenos. Later accounts of the progress of the storm and destruction vary accordingly, since Ajax would have been killed in the course of the general disaster if he died off Euboea, but he must have been killed before or after the mass of the fleet was most gravely imperilled if he died further south among the smaller Aegean islands. Hyginus brings all the events together, stating that the gods sent a storm against the Greeks at the Capharean Rocks because they had despoiled the shrines of the gods, and that Ajax was struck dead there by Athena in the course of the storm.²² Apollodorus recounts on the other hand that Zeus sent the storm at the request of Athena while the fleet was off Tenos in the southern Aegean; and although Ajax perished at that point after his ship was destroyed by a thunderbolt, the rest of the fleet was driven on towards Euboea, where many ships were lured on to Cape Caphareus by a false beacon kindled by Nauplios.²³ There were also versions that reversed this order of events by stating that the storm struck the fleet off Euboea, causing the usual destruction, while Ajax was killed somewhat later after being driven southwards to the islands.²⁴

Athena was often said to have hurled a thunderbolt at the lesser Ajax, or at his ship, or at the Greek ships in general, even though this was not a usual weapon of hers and she had to borrow it from her father Zeus.²⁵ According to Apollodorus, Ajax

escaped on to a rock after his ship was shattered by the thunderbolt, but proceeded to boast about his good fortune, much as in the *Odyssey*, saying that he had survived against the will of Athena; and Poseidon was so enraged by his presumption that he split the rock with his trident, causing him to be thrown off and drowned. His body was cast ashore on Myconos, where it was discovered and buried by Thetis.²⁶ Or, in a slightly different version, it was washed ashore on Delos, which lies nearby, and the goddess buried it there out of pity²⁷ (although the island was normally too holy for human burials).

The malevolent activities of Nauplios figure in most narratives; Hyginus even suggests that he killed the survivors who managed to swim to the shore.²⁸ Awkward though the subject may seem for a dramatist, Sophocles portrayed the revenge of Nauplios in a lost play called *Nauplios the Fire-Kindler* (*Nauplios Pyrkaios*). He was sometimes presented in tragedy as having visited Troy shortly after the death of his son, only to find that his concerns were brushed aside, which might help to explain why he came to nurse such hatred against the Greeks in general. In a lost play by Euripides, his son Oiax, who was serving at Troy, was said to have informed him of the murder of Palamedes by inscribing the story on to oar-blades and tossing them into the sea (rather like a message in a bottle), a splendidly impractical means of communication that was mocked by Aristophanes.²⁹ In a further development first attested by the Hellenistic poet Lycophron, Nauplios also sought to exact revenge on the Greeks in quite another way, by visiting their homes while they were away to incite their wives to commit adultery,³⁰ see further on p. 503.

Even though many ships were supposed to have been wrecked as a result of the storm and also (in the post-epic tradition at least) of the treachery of Nauplios, the victims are anonymous almost without exception. The only hero of any significance to be named as having been killed off Euboea is **Meges**, son of Phyleus, a grandson of Augeias, who led the men of Doulichion and the Echinadian Islands to Troy. In addition to Meges, who makes a few minor appearances in the *Iliad*, two lesser victims are sometimes cited from among the leaders who are listed in the second book of the epic, namely Gouneus from Epirus and Prothoos from Magnesia (although they both settled in Libya in another account).³¹ It would seem that the myth of the great storm was elaborated at a relatively late period when it was already firmly established that most of the major heroes had arrived home safely.

The adventures of Calchas and other Greeks who travelled overland within Asia Minor

We must now consider the adventures of some heroes who travelled away by land after the fall of Troy. Two groups are mentioned in the *Returns* as having done so, namely the seer Calchas and some companions who travelled south in Asia Minor, and Neoptolemos and his party who passed around towards Greece by a northerly route.³²

According to the *Returns*, CALCHAS made his way to Colophon, about halfway down the coast, accompanied by **Leonteus**, son of Coronos, and **Polypoites**, son of Peirithoos, two heroes from northern Greece who had been the joint leaders of the

Lapiths during the war; and later sources add two further men to the group, **Amphilochos**, son of Amphiaraios, who was a seer like Calchas, and **Podaleirios**, son of Asclepios.³³ Calchas, son of Thestor, had regularly applied his divinatory skills to the benefit of the Greek expeditionary force, and he might almost be described as having been its official seer; he had thus interpreted the portent of the snake at Aulis to enable the force to sail away in the first place (see p. 461), had told Agamemnon to return Chryseis to her father (see p. 473), and had revealed a precondition for the fall of Troy (see p. 480). He now departed by land with his companions because he could foresee through his own powers that grave danger awaited the Greek fleet at sea (or according to a more prosaic explanation, because his ships were no longer seaworthy).³⁴

After arriving in Colophon, Calchas and his companions were entertained by another celebrated seer, MOPSOS, who was a grandson of the great Theban seer Teiresias. Before long, however, the two seers quarrelled over the art of divination and challenged one another to a contest, a risky enterprise for Calchas because he had been warned by an oracle that he would die if he ever met a better diviner than himself. In Apollodorus' account of the story, Calchas started the contest by posing a question to Mopsos, who was asked to say how many figs were growing on a fig tree nearby. He replied that there were ten thousand, or a bushel by volume with a single fig left over, which turned out to be correct; but when Mopsos then asked Calchas to tell him how many piglets a certain sow was carrying, Calchas replied incorrectly that there were eight, and Mopsos was able to correct him in advance by foretelling that the sow would give birth to nine piglets, all of them male, at the sixth hour on the following day. Calchas was so distraught when this turned out to be correct that he died or killed himself.³⁵ This account, which is first attested by Lycophron, seems to be a composite version put together from two earlier accounts in which Calchas posed a single question to Mopsos. For in a Hesiodic account, probably from the *Melampodeia*, Calchas died after Mopsos gave the correct answer to the question about the figs;³⁶ while in another early version ascribed to Pherecydes, he died after Mopsos was able to give the correct reply to the question about the piglets (by saying in this case that the sow would give birth to three piglets, one of them female).³⁷

In a wholly different version of the story of their confrontation, a rivalry developed between Calchas and Mopsos over the possession of the oracle of Apollo at Claros (near Colophon, see p. 366), and matters came to a head when Mopsos predicted defeat for Amphimachos, king of Lydia, in a forthcoming war, while Calchas urged the king on with a prediction of victory. When the king was then defeated, Mopsos came to be honoured all the more highly and Calchas committed suicide.³⁸

After the death of Calchas, his companions dispersed in various directions. Polypoites and Leonteus travelled eastwards to settle in the land of the Medes, or else returned to Troy and sailed home again from there.³⁹ Podaleirios visited the Delphic oracle to ask where he should settle, and when told to settle in a place where he would suffer no harm if the sky fell in, he made his home at Syreon in Caria, a place that was surrounded on all sides by tall mountains.⁴⁰ And finally,

AMPHILOCHOS, who was a seer like so many descendants of Melampous, joined together with Mopsos to found a joint oracle at Mallos in Cilicia, in the south-eastern corner of Asia Minor. Although Amphilochos decided to sail home after a time, the situation there proved unsatisfactory and he returned to Mallos a year later to reclaim his original position; but he found that Mopsos was unwilling to accept him back, and each caused the death of the other when they tried to settle the matter by single combat. They worked together happily enough during their posthumous existence, nonetheless, continuing to deliver prophecies at their joint oracle, which was highly regarded in Hellenistic times.⁴¹ Another tradition suggested that Amphilochos founded Amphilochian Argos after the Trojan War, a city on the Ambracian Gulf in southern Epirus.⁴²

Neoptolemos travels overland to Epirus with Helenos and Andromache; his marriage and early death

NEOPTOLEMOS, the young son of Achilles, was usually said to have avoided the dangers of the sea-crossing by travelling largely or wholly overland to north-western Greece, to establish himself as a local ruler in Epirus. Since his grandfather Peleus, the king of Phthia in southern Thessaly, was commonly thought to have still been alive at the time, Phthia might have seemed a more obvious destination for him, and the *Odyssey* seems to indicate that he did indeed go there, for it states that he brought the Myrmidons (i.e. men from Peleus' kingdom, see p. 426) home safely;⁴³ but Neoptolemos was presented in the *Returns* as travelling to Epirus, and that became the accepted tradition.

According to the summary of the *Returns*, he passed overland by a northerly route by way of Thrace, after having received a warning from his divine grandmother Thetis (who was aware of the dangers that awaited the Greek fleet at sea). He met Odysseus on the way at Maroneia, a port-town in south-western Thrace, and buried his father's aged tutor Phoinix when he died in the course of the journey; and after reaching the land of the Molossians in Epirus, he was acknowledged by Peleus (a point that will merit further consideration).⁴⁴ Apollodorus adds some more details, which may well have come from the early epic tradition, saying that Neoptolemos initially set off with Agamemnon's section of the fleet, sailing as far as the island of Tenedos, but delayed there at the urging of Thetis when the others resumed their voyage, remaining there for two days before going away to continue his journey by land rather than by sea. He was accompanied furthermore by two notable Trojans, Hector's widow Andromache (who is known to have been assigned to him as a prize of war in the early epic tradition) and the seer Helenos, a son of Priam who had become estranged from his fellow-Trojans (see p. 481 for the circumstances).⁴⁵ After arriving in Epirus, Neoptolemos established himself as king of the Molossians by defeating them in battles. And fathered a son Molossos by Andromache.⁴⁶ Although the idea that Helenos came with him is not attested for early epic, it is later reported that Helenos used his divinatory powers to advise him that Epirus was appointed to be his home,⁴⁷ and this was probably an original feature of the legend.

It was commonly agreed in the subsequent tradition that Neoptolemos settled in

Epirus, whether permanently or for a time at least, even if it was sometimes said that he sailed back from Troy by sea rather than passing around the north by land. In one version, for instance, he wandered off course while trying to sail to his birthplace, the island of Scyros,⁴⁸ or else he sailed to his father's homeland in Thessaly by proceeding overland to Epirus on the advice of Thetis.⁴⁹ As for his grandfather Peleus, it is already indicated in the Homeric epics that he was in a sadly vulnerable position while Achilles was away at Troy,⁵⁰ and it is reported in tragedy and later sources that he was indeed expelled from his kingdom by Acastos, king of Iolcos, or the sons of Acastos,⁵¹ who had good reason to hate him because he had previously sacked Iolcos (see p. 429). When it is stated in the summary of the *Returns* that Peleus acknowledged Neoptolemos in the land of the Molossians, that could imply that he was already presented in that poem as having been expelled from Phthia.

A late source, Dictys, provides an interesting narrative, which may have originated in tragedy, saying that Neoptolemos sailed over from Molossia to help his grandfather after hearing of his expulsion, and found him hiding in a cave on the Sepiades, a group of islands to the west of southern Thessaly. Neoptolemos ambushed and killed the sons of Acastos, here named Menalippos and Pleisthenes, when they visited the islands on a hunting trip; and he then lured Acastos to the cave by disguising himself as a Trojan captive and telling him that Neoptolemos was lying there unguarded. Thetis intervened, however, to prevent Neoptolemos from killing Acastos; and after this narrow escape, Acastos agreed to surrender all claim to the kingdom of Peleus. So Neoptolemos went off to reclaim it in the company of his father and grandmother Thetis.⁵² Although Apollodorus states at the end of his narrative that Neoptolemos recovered the kingdom after Peleus was expelled from it by the sons of Acastos,⁵³ nothing is reported about the circumstances in the surviving epitome of this part of the work. It was not often suggested that he came to rule in Phthia.⁵⁴

Although Andromache was said to have borne one or more children to Neoptolemos in Molossia, he took another woman as his wife, namely Hermione, the daughter of Helen and Menelaos. According to the *Odyssey*, she was promised to him at Troy by Menelaos, who sent her to him after the war, dispatching her to the city at the Myrmidons (i.e. Phthia), where he was now ruling as king.⁵⁵ In the subsequent tradition, however, she was usually thought to have lived with him in his kingdom in Epirus. She apparently bore him no children in the early tradition, even if children are sometimes ascribed to the couple in late sources. According to the early mythographer Pherecydes, Neoptolemos travelled indeed to Delphi (where he met his death as we will see) for the very purpose of consulting the oracle about how he might have children by his wife.⁵⁶ From the classical period onwards, it was often said that Hermione had already been promised or given to Orestes, the young son of Agamemnon, while Menelaos was away at Troy, and that conflict arose as a result between him and Neoptolemos after the war;⁵⁷ but since this was a secondary development, which apparently originated in tragedy, the stories associated with it will be considered separately in connection with Orestes, see p. 519.

Although varying accounts were offered of the precise course of events, it was commonly agreed that Neoptolemos met a violent end at a comparatively young age

during a visit to Delphi. Three main versions of the story of his death can be distinguished, suggesting that he was killed in a quarrel over the sacrifices, or that he provoked his own death by demanding reparation from Apollo for the death of his father, or that Orestes murdered him or arranged his murder because he was angry at having lost Hermione to him.

- (i) According to Pindar, Neoptolemos visited Delphi to dedicate some of the finest of the Trojan spoils to Apollo, but he became embroiled in a quarrel over the meat from the sacrifices and met his death as a consequence. As the scholia explain, he objected to the traditional practice by which the temple attendants kept most of the meat for themselves.⁵⁸ The Delphian who killed him was sometimes said to have been a certain Machaireus (Knife-man), son of Daïtes (Divider or Apportioner), whose name refers to the special knife or *machaira* that the priests would use to divide the meat. Such a knife would have been well fitted to serve as a murder weapon if a dispute over the meat had turned violent; Pindar mentions that Neoptolemos was killed with a *machaira* (and may perhaps have intended that his audience should recall the name of the killer from this).⁵⁹ In a somewhat different account from another poem, Pindar states that Apollo had planned an early death for Neoptolemos because of the way in which he had killed Priam (i.e. at an altar of Zeus, see p. 485), and thus slew him in his sacred precinct while he was quarrelling with the temple attendants.⁶⁰ According to Pherecydes, Neoptolemos visited Delphi to consult the oracle about his childless marriage, but was moved to anger when he saw the Delphians removing meat from the sanctuary and tried to take it away from them; although the surviving text goes on to state that the hero killed himself with a *machaira*, it is surely corrupt, and we can safely assume that he would have been killed by a Delphian as usual.⁶¹
- (ii) Some accounts claim that Neoptolemos went to Delphi to seek reparation from Apollo for having killed or helped to kill his father Achilles at Troy (see p. 477 for the circumstances). When he proceeded to plunder the temple or even set fire to it, he was killed by the temple attendants, or by Machaireus specifically, or by Apollo himself.⁶²
- (iii) In other accounts, Orestes killed Neoptolemos at Delphi, or at least arranged for him to be killed there because he was angry at having lost his wife Hermione to him, see further on p. 519.

Neoptolemos was honoured in hero-cult at his Delphian tomb, which could be seen in the precinct of Apollo if one turned to the left after leaving the temple. Pindar suggests that his death was divinely ordained because he was destined to watch over the ceremonies at the shrine. He was supposed to have come to the assistance of the Delphians when they were attacked by the Gauls in 279 BC.⁶³

The adventures of four Greek heroes who were said to have travelled to Italy in the later tradition

In the early epic tradition, as we have seen, the great majority of the Greek heroes and rulers arrived home safely, to enjoy some repose after the efforts and dangers of the war; and with the exception of Odysseus and Menelaos, none were even said to have wandered very far off course. In the Hellenistic and later tradition, however, a number of well-known figures were said to have travelled to the west, to Italy, or even to Iberia, to become involved in further adventures and found cities in those distant parts, after having been blown off course or having met with trouble on arriving home. Although any detailed consideration of this Italian appendix to the

mythology of the returns would take us out of our way, it may be of interest to consider the stories of this kind that came to be attached to four notable heroes, Diomedes, Philoctetes, Idomoneus, and Epeios.

DIOMEDES was the greatest hero who came to be said to have sailed away into this distant exile. To explain why this should have come about, an epilogue was added to the famous story in the *Iliad* that presented him as wounding Aphrodite in battle at Troy (see p. 368).⁶⁴ For it came to be suggested that the goddess exacted revenge on him by inciting his wife Aigialeia to commit adultery with other men, until she finally deserted him for Cometes, son of Sthenelos, a minor member of the Argive royal family whom he had placed in charge of his household during his absence. As in the ancient myth of Aigisthos and Clytemnestra, which plainly provided the model for the present story, the guilty couple set out to murder the king on his return, but unsuccessfully in this case, because he escaped by taking refuge at an altar of Hera or Demeter and then fleeing abroad to Italy.⁶⁵ Or, in a somewhat different account, Aigialeia was incited to embark on this course of action by Nauplios, who, in addition to trying to wreck the Greek fleet (see p. 498), sailed to various parts of Greece to try to turn the wives of Greek rulers against their husbands, inciting Aigialeia and Clytemnestra alike to commit their infidelities,⁶⁶ and perhaps also the wife of Idomoneus as we will see.

When Diomedes arrived in Italy, he came to shore in Apulia in the south-east of the land, where the local ruler, Daunus or Daunios, offered him his daughter and a share of the kingdom if he would fight as his ally in a war against the neighbouring Messapians (Calabrians);⁶⁷ and after establishing himself in the region by that means, he spent the rest of his life there, fathering two sons by his new Italian wife. In some accounts, however, things turned out badly for him once again, since he was eventually murdered by Daunios (or a son of his) as the result of a subsequent disagreement.⁶⁸ He was said to have founded the town of Argyrium (Arpi), originally naming it Argos Hippiion (i.e. Argos of the Horses) in memory of 'horse-rearing Argos'. Making this his new home city, he also founded various other towns, including Sipontum, Vanusium, and Venusia.⁶⁹

It may seem curious that Diomedes should be said to have founded towns in a part of Italy that contained no Greek colonies at all, even if it had come to be extensively Hellenized by the period at which these myths were devised; but since the Greeks who lived in the main colonies of the west were well aware that their cities had been founded from specific regions of the motherland in historical times, it is understandable that Greek foundation myths should tend to be connected in that area with obscure places, often not even Greek. Since these myths were of late and arbitrary invention, moreover, they are hardly ever accompanied by memorable stories, and are thus are not of any great interest in any respect. Myths of a rather different kind were also developed, however, sometimes of much greater interest, in which a Greek or Trojan pre-history was attached to a city of later foundation, as we have already seen with two notable colonies in a part of Italy that was supposed to have been visited by Heracles (see p. 252). The most important body of myth of this kind, which connected Aineias and his Trojan followers with the pre-history of no less a city than Rome itself, will be considered at length in the next chapter. A Greek

or Trojan pedigree could be attached, moreover, to the original inhabitants of cities or regions that were settled by Greeks (or came under Greek influence) at a later period. According to a relatively early claim of that kind, attested by Herodotus, the Iapygians and Messapians of Apulia were said to be descended from Cretans who had been driven ashore there after sailing to Sicily to avenge the death of Minos⁷⁰ (who was supposed to have been murdered in Sicily, see p. 298).

The most picturesque feature of the Italian legend of Diomedes is the lore associated with some remarkable birds, known as the birds of Diomedes, which lived on the island off Diomedea, off the Apulian coast (presumably one of the Isole Tramiti), where the hero was supposed to have been buried. For it was said that these birds were friendly to Greek visitors but would attack anyone else who set foot on the island, and that they tended the grave of Diomedes by sprinkling fresh water on it every day. Although it was agreed that these birds were (or were descended from) transformed followers of Diomedes, divergent accounts were offered of the circumstances that had led to their transformation. According to one account, some Illyrians who coveted the lands that these Greeks had acquired in Apulia murdered them while they were offering sacrifices on the islands, and Zeus then transformed them into birds out of pity at their fate;⁷¹ or else the transformation was a punishment imposed by Aphrodite because she was still angry that their leader had wounded her at Troy, or because they had abused her for persecuting him after the war.⁷² Or, in yet another account, they were transformed, presumably out of pity by some god, after they were treacherously killed by Aeneas after becoming shipwrecked on the island.⁷³

In the *Aeneid*, the Latins vainly attempt to win the support of Diomedes in fighting against Aeneas and his Trojan followers.⁷⁴ Vergil offers an idiosyncratic portrayal of the hero, deviating from the usual Greek tradition in some notable respects, with regard both to his character and to his conduct at Troy.

The archer PHILOCTETES was another great hero who acquired an Italian legend. Although Sophocles still indicates a happy return for him in the play that bears his name,⁷⁵ first performed in 409 BC, he was later said to have ended up in Italy because he was blown off course while trying to reach his native Thessaly, or because he was greeted with a revolt when he arrived there.⁷⁶ After settling in the toe of Italy, he founded four towns in that region, Petilia, Crimissa, Macalle, and Chione,⁷⁷ all of them insignificant places that lay between Croton and Thurii. Now that his wanderings were over, he raised a temple to Apollo Aleios (the Wanderer), in which he dedicated his bow and arrows, which had originally belonged to Heracles.⁷⁸ He met his death while trying to assist some Rhodians who had come to the area and had fallen into conflict with the local people.⁷⁹

According to the late tradition, IDOMONEUS, king of Crete, a grandson of Minos, spent his last years in the heel of Italy, where he founded the towns of Uria and Castrum Minervae.⁸⁰ The two tales that were put forward to explain his exile are of more interest than anything that is recorded of his deeds in Italy. One was yet another tale of betrayal. Idomoneus had entrusted his kingdom to a certain Leucos, son of Talos, whom he had reared as a foster-child; but during his absence, Leucos killed his wife Meda and daughter Cleisitheira, seized power for himself, and drove

the king away on his return. Because of the inadequacy of our sources, it is not clear why Leucos should have killed the two women, or indeed whether he was always credited with the same motives for doing so. Lycophron indicates that Leucos was betrothed to the king's daughter, and that Nauplios incited trouble in some unexplained fashion through his lies; while Apollodorus, whose account is preserved only in brief summary, reports more specifically that Nauplios incited Meda to be unfaithful to her husband, presumably with Leucos. Beyond that all must remain a matter for conjecture, since no direct explanation is offered for the murders in either of our sources.⁸¹

If the preceding story invokes the machinations of Nauplios yet again, as in the case of Agamemnon and Diomedes, the other story introduces a familiar motif from folklore, that of the rash vow. When struck by a violent storm during his return voyage, Idomoneus vowed, so we are told, that he would offer up in sacrifice whatever he first encountered after making a safe landfall in Crete, and that turned out to be his own son or daughter; and he was thus driven out by the Cretans when he tried to bring his child to sacrifice, or when the land was struck by a plague after he had fulfilled his vow.⁸²

Even if EPEIOs, the builder of the Wooden Horse (see p. 427), was hardly a hero of the same stature as the last three, his transfer to Italy allowed it to be claimed that some very notable relics of the Trojan War could be seen there, the tools that he had used when constructing the Horse. It came to be said that he had been driven to Italy while trying to sail home and had founded the cities of Metapontum and Lagaria in Lucania, just above the toe of Italy. He dedicated his tools in the temple of Athena at Lagaria, after that goddess, who had advised him during the building of the Horse, appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to do so.⁸³

The wanderings of Odysseus

Odysseus wanders through distant seas for ten years

Odysseus was driven far off course and wandered the seas for ten years, passing into a purely mythical realm in the far west, before he was finally able to rejoin his ever-faithful wife, Penelope, in his native Ithaca; we will follow his adventures as they are described in the *Odyssey*, marking each successive landfall.

- (i) According to Nestor's account of the Greek returns in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus was among the first to set off from Troy along with Nestor and Diomedes, but he parted with the others as a result of unspecified disagreements when this group of ships called in at the island of Tenedos nearby (see p. 496), and headed back towards Troy with his followers.⁸⁴
- (ii) Odysseus mentions nothing of this in his own narrative, merely stating that the wind bore him from Troy to Ismaros, a town of the CICONIANS (Cicones) in south-western Thrace. At the outset, he had twelve ships under his command. He launched a frankly piratical raid on Ismaros, and captured the women of the city and quantities of treasure; but when his men insisted on delaying to feast and drink, the Ciconians of the surrounding area gathered to make a counter-attack, and expelled the Greeks, causing many losses.⁸⁵ During the sack of the city, Odysseus protected MARON, son of Euanthos, the local priest of Apollo, along with his

wife and child; and Maron repaid him by giving him some treasure and twelve jars of sweet wine,⁸⁶ which would prove invaluable, as we will see shortly, when his own life came under threat from the Cyclops Polyphemos.

- (iii) After leaving the land of the Ciconians, Odysseus and his followers were driven southwards for two days and nights to Cape Malea at the south-eastern tip of the Peloponnese; and as they were trying to sail round the cape to make for Ithaca (off the west coast of mainland Greece), they were caught by the savage North Wind and were driven across the sea for nine days and nights to the land of the LOTOS-EATERS. As with all the places visited by Odysseus during his more distant wanderings that now commence, their land is located in a purely mythical realm in Homer's account, even if later tradition placed it on the Libyan coast.⁸⁷ When Odysseus sent some of his men to investigate, the Lotos-eaters received them graciously and offered them some of their lotos-fruit, which caused those who ate it to forget their homecoming and friends and to desire nothing more than to sit there chewing the honey-sweet fruit. On discovering what had happened to them, Odysseus dragged them back to their ships by force and made a hasty departure.⁸⁸
- (iv) From there he sailed on to the land of the CYCLOPES, who were a race of giants with a single eye in the middle of their forehead. Leaving the other ships and their crews at an uninhabited island not far off the coast, he went exploring with his own crew, entered the deserted cave of a Cyclops called POLYPHEMOS, and gazed at the many crates of cheese and pens crowded with lambs and kids that filled the cave. Against all the advice of his comrades, who urged him to steal some provisions and hurry away, Odysseus insisted that they should wait until the owner returned, for he was curious to see what he was like and hoped to receive gifts of hospitality. After driving his flocks into the cave, Polyphemos blocked up the entrance with a huge rock; and on discovering the strangers, he demonstrated his notion of hospitality by dashing out the brains of two of them and eating their flesh for his supper. In the morning, he breakfasted in the same way and then drove his flocks to pasture, pushing the rock back afterwards to leave the men imprisoned. Odysseus now had time to devise a means of vengeance. To kill the giant as he slept would achieve nothing because he and his comrades would be unable to shift the rock; so he sharpened a stake and hardened its end in the fire to procure a weapon for use against the Cyclops, and on that evening, when Polyphemos had supped on two more of his men, gave him a draught of some very powerful wine that he had received from Maron at Ismaros. Having made him very drunk by this means, he and his men heated the end of the stake and used it to gouge out the single eye of their jailer. Polyphemos cried out to his fellow Cyclopes, who lived on the heights around, and they came rushing from every side to investigate. Odysseus had prepared for this eventuality, however, by telling Polyphemos that his name was Nobody (*Outis*); so when the Cyclopes asked him what the trouble was, and he replied from inside that 'Nobody' was attacking him, they went away again, supposing that he must simply be ill if nobody was causing him any harm. In the morning, when Polyphemos opened the cave to let out his sheep and goats, Odysseus and his men escaped with them, each of the men tied to the underside of a ram, and Odysseus clinging to the belly of the largest ram of all.⁸⁹ While sailing off in his ship, Odysseus taunted the Cyclops in the heedlessness of his triumph, and revealed his true name. Polyphemos responded by hurling two huge stones at the ship, which narrowly escaped destruction, and then praying to his father Poseidon to take action against the newly identified Odysseus. He prayed that Odysseus should never reach home, or if he was fated to do so, that he should arrive home late after losing all his comrades and find trouble awaiting him in his house.⁹⁰
- (v) After his encounter with the Cyclopes, Odysseus made a happier landfall at Aiolia, the island of AIOLOS, ruler of the winds, who entertained him and his men without stint for a full month. Each of the six sons of Aiolos was married to one of his six daughters, and all of them lived together at the palace with their father and mother, feasting continually day after day.

His kingdom is a purely mythical place in the *Odyssey*, a floating island surrounded by cliffs of unyielding bronze; but it came to be suggested in the later tradition that he lived on one of the Aeolian (Lipari) Islands to the north of Sicily. He finally helped Odysseus on his way by enclosing all but one of the winds in a leather bag and attaching it to his ship, so that only the gentle west wind was left to blow him safely home. When Ithaca came within sight and there seemed no further occasion for worry, Odysseus fell asleep after his long exertions at the helm, and his men took advantage of this to investigate the contents of the bag, supposing that it contained gifts of silver and gold that he was intending to keep for himself; but as soon as they opened it up, the winds rushed out and blew them straight back to their starting-point. Aiolos turned Odysseus away without further help, saying that it would be wrong for him to offer assistance to a man who was evidently hated by the gods.⁹¹

(vi) After six days on the high seas, the voyagers reached the land of the LAISTRYGONIANS (Laistrygones), a race of cannibal giants. When three of the crew were sent ashore to investigate, they encountered the daughter of the king as she was fetching water, and she took them to the palace; the queen, who was as large as a mountain, summoned her husband Antiphates, who seized one of the men for his supper while the others fled to the ships. Alerted by the shouts of Antiphates, the other Laistrygonians hurried to the cliffs around the harbour, sank the ships below by hurling huge boulders at them, and then speared the crewmen like fish to provide themselves with fresh meat. Odysseus and his crew alone survived because their ship was moored outside the harbour entrance.⁹²

(vii) Odysseus' next port of call was the mythical island of Aiaie, the home of the enchantress CIRCE, who was a daughter of Helios by the Okeanid Perse (or Perseis) and the sister of Aietes.⁹³ Observing a column of smoke arising from Circe's house in the forested interior, Odysseus divided his forces into two and sent one group to investigate under the command of his brother-in-law Eurylochos. On arriving at the house in the forest, they encountered lions and wolves outside, which fawned on them, standing on their hind legs and wagging their tails rather than attacking them as might be expected; for these were human beings whom Circe had transformed by means of her enchantments. Circe seemed most friendly and invited them to drink some barley-mixture, but it contained some drugs that transformed them into pigs, although they retained their human intelligence. Eurylochos had remained outside, however, suspecting a trap, and he rushed back to Odysseus to report what had happened. As Odysseus was hurrying to the rescue, he came across Hermes, who gave him a herb called moly to serve as a counter-charm. He was thus unaffected by Circe's drugs, and she was so dismayed when he proceeded to threaten her with his sword that she proposed that they should settle their differences by going to bed together. She then swore not to harm him and agreed to return his comrades to their original form. In the later tradition, Circe was said to have borne children to Odysseus, namely Telegonos (see below, p. 512), Latinos, and Agrios.⁹⁴ When his comrades began to grow impatient after a year on the island, he asked Circe to allow them to continue on their way, and was alarmed to be told that he must first visit the Underworld to seek a prophecy from the ghost of Teiresias.⁹⁵

(viii) In accordance with Circe's instructions, Odysseus sailed across the outer Ocean to a land of gloom in the furthest west, and arrived safely at the boundaries of Hades (see p. 99). After pouring some blood into a trench to allow the shades to drink from it to revive their wits, he was able to speak to many of them, including his mother Anticleia, who had died (or perhaps killed herself) during his absence; she was able to tell him about the state of affairs at home and about the sorrows of his ageing father Laertes.⁹⁶ Teiresias prophesied that he would reach home in spite of the antagonism of Poseidon (who had been angered by the blinding of Polyphemos), but warned that he would lose his comrades and ship if they harmed the cattle of Helios on the way (see below, pp. 509–10); and he also told him that he could expect trouble at home, since his halls were thronged with suitors who were courting his wife and wasting his property. After killing the suitors, he should travel abroad to the

mainland (so Teiresias advised), and proceed inland with an oar until he met people who knew nothing of the sea and mistook the oar for a winnowing-fan. He should then fix the oar into the ground and make his peace with Poseidon by sacrificing a ram, a bull, and a boar to him. In the end, after all his troubles, he could expect to meet a peaceful death among his own people in his prosperous old age.⁹⁷ Other aspects of Odysseus' visit to the Underworld are discussed in connection with the mythology of that realm in [Chapter 5](#).

- (ix) After returning to Circe's island, Odysseus set off on his journey home, and soon had to confront some fearsome perils, forearmed with advice from Circe.⁹⁸ He had to find his way past the SIRENS (Seirenes) first of all, female daimones who sang so enchantingly that passing sailors were lured to their island, where they apparently wasted away because they could turn their attention to nothing other than the sweet singing of these creatures. The Sirens are described as sitting in a meadow with the mouldering bodies of their victims heaped around them. In accordance with Circe's instructions, Odysseus stopped up the ears of his men with beeswax, and had himself bound to the mast; and although he signalled to his men to untie him on hearing their song, they bound him all the tighter, and he was able to enjoy their song and yet live to tell the tale (see [Figure 22.1](#)).⁹⁹ Since nothing is said here about the outward appearance of the Sirens, Homer may well have imagined them as being like human women in form. There are only two of them in the *Odyssey*, but they are generally three in number (or sometimes four) in the subsequent literature. In that literature and in the visual arts from the time of the earliest representations from the sixth century BC, they are commonly pictured as Harpy-like creatures with the body of a bird and the head of a woman. As to their descent, they were often said to have been borne by one or other of the Muses, for obvious reasons, to the river-god Acheloo.¹⁰⁰



[Figure 22.1](#). Odysseus, tied to the mast, listens to the Sirens' song. Red-figure stamnos from Vulci. BM 1843.11.3–31. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

According to a tradition that first appears in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, they had once been servants or companions of the young Persephone.¹⁰¹ Transformation myths were devised in this connection to explain their peculiar form. Ovid states that they were originally human in form, but prayed to be furnished with wings while they were searching for the abducted Persephone, to enable them to extend their search over the seas also.¹⁰² Or in Hyginus' version, this was apparently a punishment that was imposed on them by Demeter because they had failed to come to the aid of Persephone.¹⁰³ There was also a wholly different story in which they were transformed by Aphrodite because they had scorned the joys of love.¹⁰⁴

The Hellenistic poet Lycophron is the first author to suggest that they were fated to hurl themselves into the sea if anyone should survive, as Odysseus did, after hearing their singing.¹⁰⁵ After their home came to be placed in Italian waters, local traditions were developed in which their bodies were said to have been washed ashore at various places on the west coast of Italy.¹⁰⁶ The Siren Parthenope, who was supposedly washed ashore at Naples, had a most interesting cult there and an annual festival in which she was honoured with torch-races.¹⁰⁷ For the Argonauts' encounter with the Sirens, which is set at an earlier period in mythical history, see p. 409.

Odysseus had learned from Circe that he would have to choose between two possible routes after passing the Sirens, for he could either face the hazard of the Planctai (Wandering Rocks) or try to make a safe passage through the narrow straits between the monstrous SCYLLA and the whirlpool CHARYBDIS; but since Circe had warned him that only a single ship, the *Argo*, had ever survived the Planctai, and then only with the help of the Nereids (see p. 409), he was bound to select the latter route.¹⁰⁸ Preferring to lose a few of his men to Scylla than to face the risk of having his ship sucked into the whirlpool, crew and all, Odysseus steered closer to Scylla than to Charybdis. The six-headed monster, who lived in a cave in the side of a cliff, duly reached out to snatch away six men, but the rest of the crew survived unscathed.¹⁰⁹

In Homer's description, Scylla had twelve legs and six extremely long necks, each ending in a fearsome head with three rows of teeth. She was hidden inside her cave up to her middle, but she would reach out with her necks to seize dolphins, seals, and other large sea-animals, or sailors from passing ships.¹¹⁰ Later tradition suggested that she lived in a cave in the Straits of Messina, the channel that separates Italy from Sicily, although some tried to explain away the whole story by alleging that a whirlpool, rock, or other natural danger of the area lay behind it.¹¹¹ She is usually depicted in works of art with a woman's upper body and head, and a lower body formed from one or two fish-tails or dragon-tails, and often with the foreparts of one or more dogs springing from her hips. Late authors explain her monstrous form through transformation stories. On learning that Poseidon had embarked on a love affair with Scylla (here described as a daughter of Phorcys), his wife Amphitrite sprinkled magic herbs into her bathing-place, causing her to be transformed from a beautiful nymph into a many-headed monster.¹¹² Or, in Ovid's version, the sea-god Glaucos fell in love with Scylla, and sought the help of the enchantress Circe when she failed to respond; but Circe herself promptly fell in love

with Glaucos, and was so jealous when he reaffirmed his love for Scylla that she transformed her into a monster by sprinkling her bathing-place with herbs and chanting magical spells.¹¹³

(x) The voyagers arrived next at the island of THRINACIA (Thrinacie), where the cattle and sheep of the sun-god Helios were pastured under the care of his daughters Phaethousa and Lampetie. Having received warnings on the matter from both Teiresias and Circe, Odysseus made his men swear that they would on no account slaughter any of the god's cattle or sheep; but when they ran short of food after being held back on the island for a full month by adverse winds, they killed some of the cattle without the knowledge of their leader, while he was in another part of the island praying to the gods for help. Lampetie reported the theft to her father Helios, who complained in his turn to Zeus; and Zeus struck Odysseus' ship with a thunderbolt as it was sailing away from the island, causing the entire crew to be killed apart from Odysseus himself.¹¹⁴

(xi) While making his way to safety as best he could on a raft constructed from the wreckage, Odysseus was almost sucked into Charybdis, but survived to be washed ashore on the island of CALYPSO nine days afterwards.¹¹⁵ Calypso, who is described as a daughter of Atlas, was a minor goddess who lived all on her own on the island of Ogygia. She was delighted by the handsome stranger and detained him on her island as her lover for seven long years; but although she offered to make him immortal and ageless, he yearned for his wife and his native land and grew increasingly despondent. Athena finally intervened with the gods on his behalf, prompting Zeus to send Hermes to Calypso to order his release. She consented, though with a heavy heart, and helped him on his way by furnishing him with tools and materials to enable him to build a large boat.¹¹⁶

(xii) Odysseus sailed over the sea for nineteen days until he came within sight of Scherie, the land of the PHAEACIANS (Phaiaces), on the eighteenth; but before he could draw into the coast, his enemy Poseidon, who had been away feasting with the Ethiopians, caught sight of his boat and realized that the gods must have acted to help him. So the god set to work to reverse his good fortune, by raising a mighty storm to wreck his boat (see further on p. 125). His plight was observed, however, by the sea-goddess Leucothea (formerly Ino, see p. 394), who felt pity for him and lent him her divine veil (*krēdemnon*), telling him that he would be saved from drowning if he tied it around his chest. After two days and nights in the water, he managed to crawl ashore by the mouth of a river in Scherie, weakened and exhausted but alive. As soon as he had dropped the veil back into the water to allow Leucothea to recover it, he lay down under some bushes nearby and fell asleep.¹¹⁷

On the next morning, NAUSICAA, the daughter of ALCINOOS, king of the Phaeacians, came to the river-mouth with her maids to wash the clothes of the household. Odysseus was awakened by them as they were playing a ball-game afterwards, and emerged from the bushes to investigate, naked and salt-streaked, hastily breaking off a leafy branch to hold in front of him. Nausicaa stood to face him as all her maidens fled, and responded sympathetically when he explained his troubles and asked for help. After providing him with clothes and refreshment, she guided him to the city and advised that he should appeal as a suppliant to her mother ARETE, who was greatly honoured by the king and the people alike.¹¹⁸ The king and queen welcomed him into their palace, and at a great banquet on the following day, the whole company listened with hushed interest as Odysseus recounted the story of his adventures; we learn most of what we know about his wanderings from his own narrative on this occasion.¹¹⁹ After loading a ship with

magnificent gifts and offering appropriate sacrifices, Alcinoo sent Odysseus on his way on the following evening. As the magical ship sped through the sea on its overnight journey to Ithaca, flying faster than the swiftest of birds, Odysseus slept on a rug on the deck; and he was still fast asleep when the sailors laid him ashore at the end of the journey, placing his gifts under an olive tree nearby. When he woke up to find himself alone on the shore, he did not appreciate that he was home after his long years of wandering until he was assured of the fact by his protectress Athena.¹²⁰ Poseidon had to content himself with turning the Phaeacian ship to stone on its return, as a hint (which was duly taken) that the Phaeacians should never provide passage to mortals in such a way in the future.¹²¹

Odysseus exacts vengeance on the suitors after arriving home in Ithaca, and is reunited with his wife Penelope

To protect Odysseus while he made preparations for his revenge against the suitors, Athena altered his appearance to cause him to be mistaken for an old beggar, and told him to take shelter with his faithful swineherd Eumaios as she travelled over to the Peloponnese to summon his son Telemachos (who had been visiting Nestor and Menelaos to seek news of him).¹²² Odysseus revealed his true identity to Telemachos on his arrival, though not yet to Eumaios, and the three of them walked to the palace on the following morning. Although the disguised king received a touching welcome from his old hound Argos, the suitors mistook him for a beggar, as would be expected, and their leader, Antinoos, treated him with great brutality, hurling a stool at him and setting up a fight between him and the beggar Iros. After the suitors had taken their fill of food and drink in the evening, however, they went to their homes for the night at the urging of Telemachos, giving him and his father an opportunity to prepare for the forthcoming conflict by removing all the arms and armour from the hall and locking them away in a store-room.¹²³

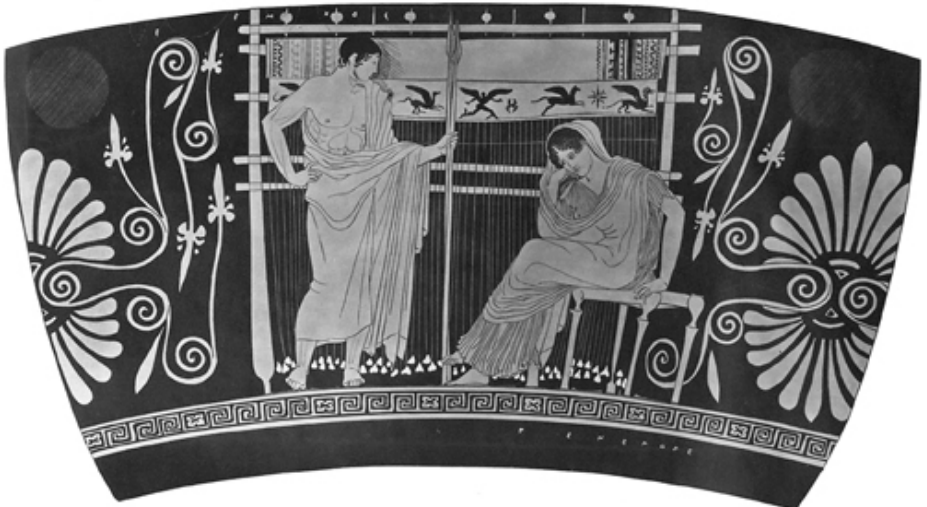


Figure 22.2. Penelope at her loom with Telemachos. Red-figure skyphos. Chiusi, Museo Nazionale; mus. nat. 1831. © akg-images/André Held.

By pretending that he was a brother of Idomeneus, king of Crete, and that he had entertained Odysseus on his home island shortly after the war, the disguised Odysseus won the sympathy of Penelope, who was now at her wits' end. For she had tried to put the suitors off by telling them that she would be unable to remarry until she had woven a shroud in preparation for the death of her father-in-law Laertes, and then extending the task by unravelling each day's work during the following night; but the stratagem had finally been betrayed by one of her maids, and she had now reached the end of the work. She disclosed that she was intending to announce on the next morning that she would marry the suitor who could string her husband's bow (a formidable weapon that would require immense strength to draw), and then shoot an arrow through a row of double-headed axes.¹²⁴ While the suitors were attempting this feat on the next morning, Odysseus withdrew for a while to reveal his identity to Eumaios and the cowherd Philoitios, and returned to the hall with them as the contest was drawing to an unsuccessful conclusion. Now that it had become clear that none of the suitors would be able to fulfil the demanded terms, the disguised Odysseus asked, in an apparently ingenuous fashion, to be allowed to try his hand. The objections of the suitors were brushed aside by Penelope, who thought it shameful that a stranger should be treated with discourtesy, and also by Telemachos, who was aware of his father's plan.

Penelope left the hall at the stranger's request before he set to work. He strung the bow without difficulty, performed the prescribed feat, and then shot Antinoos, the arrogant ringleader of the suitors, through the throat. The other suitors quaked with fear when he now revealed his true identity; and in the furious struggle that followed, he killed them one and all with the help of his son and his two faithful servants, and also of Athena who intervened on occasion to deflect the spears of the suitors.¹²⁵ Odysseus and his helpers then completed the task by hanging twelve disloyal servant-maids who had consorted with the suitors, and killing the goatherd Melanthios, who had helped the suitors during the fight by bringing arms from the store-room.¹²⁶ Eurycleia, an old servant-woman who had recognized the disguised Odysseus from a scar (see p. 554), now awakened Penelope to tell her that her husband had come back and had rid her of the suitors; and the reunited couple spent the night together on their remarkable marriage-bed, which had been constructed by Odysseus long before around the trunk of a living olive tree.¹²⁷ Odysseus made himself known to his father Laertes on the following day, and the blood-feud that was initiated by the dead suitors was swiftly brought to an end through the intervention of Athena.¹²⁸

Post-Homeric accounts of the later life of Odysseus

Odysseus is re-established in his kingdom under auspicious circumstances at the end of the *Odyssey*, and we assume that he will live there happily ever afterwards, reunited with his faithful wife; but his story was developed further in the last epic in the Trojan cycle and in the subsequent tradition. The epic in question, the *Telegonia*, which was named after Telegonos, a son who was borne to Odysseus by Circe, was an eccentric poem that took Odysseus abroad for further adventures and provided

him with an exotic death on his return. It will be remembered that when Odysseus met Teiresias during his visit to the Underworld in the *Odyssey*, the seer instructed him to visit the mainland after killing the suitors to offer sacrifices to Poseidon; although this is plainly envisaged as a temporary visit in the Homeric account, the author of the *Telegonia* took up the story and expanded it to introduce Odysseus into a long-lasting foreign entanglement. For when he arrived in the land of the Thesprotians in north-western Greece to offer the sacrifices, the queen of the Thesprotians, Callidice, urged Odysseus to stay and offered him the throne. So he remained and married her (apparently forgetting Penelope for the time being!), and fathered a son Polypoites by her; and he defeated a neighbouring people, the Brygoi, when they attacked the kingdom, even though they gained an initial victory owing to the support of the war-god Ares.¹²⁹

After the death of Callidice, Odysseus transferred his Thesprotian kingdom to Polypoites and returned to Ithaca. While he had been living with Circe long before, she had conceived a son, TELEGONOS, to him, who had been growing up on her remote island in the meantime. On learning from his mother that he was a son of Odysseus, Telegonos decided to sail off in search of him, and arrived on the coast of Ithaca by sheer chance soon after his father had returned from Thesprotia. Having no idea where he was, he proceeded to ravage the island (or simply to plunder some cattle); and when Odysseus rushed to the defence of his kingdom and property, Telegonos inflicted a fatal wound on him without realizing who he was.¹³⁰ Telegonos wielded a most unusual weapon, a spear tipped with the needle from a stingray, which had been made for him by Hephaistos at the request of Circe, using a stingray that had been caught by the sea-god Phorcys.¹³¹ This account of the death of Odysseus seems to have been inspired by some words of Teiresias in the *Odyssey*, in which the seer predicts that death will come to him *ex halos* ¹³² (which could mean ‘out of the sea’, although it evidently means ‘away from the sea’ in the original context). When Telegonos discovered the identity of his victim, he was overcome by grief and sailed back to Circe’s island with his father’s corpse, also bringing Penelope and Telemachos. The *Telegonia* descended into utter absurdity at this point (if it had not done so already) by concluding with a pair of weddings in which Telegonos married Penelope, his father’s widow, while Circe married Telemachos, the son of her former lover. We know from the surviving summary of the epic that Circe conferred immortality on Telegonos, Telemachos, and Penelope; and according to a further report that was probably also derived from the poem, she transferred Telegonos and Penelope to the Isles of the Blessed.¹³³

Many unorthodox accounts of the final years and ultimate fate of Odysseus and Penelope are recorded from the later tradition. For a representative sample, we may turn to three stories cited by Apollodorus as variants after his summary of the events of the *Telegonia*. Odysseus sent Penelope away to her father because she had been seduced by the chief suitor Antinoos, and she bore Pan to Hermes in Arcadia on the way; or Odysseus killed her because she had been seduced by Amphinomos (another of her suitors, who is presented in the *Odyssey* as being more civilized and scrupulous than his fellows); or Odysseus was sentenced to exile for having killed the suitors, and sought refuge at the court of Thoas in Aetolia (see p. 388), where he

married the king's daughter and fathered a son by her.¹³⁴ Tales of this kind are really of little interest except as curiosities; it is surely better to leave Odysseus and Penelope as Homer leaves them at the end of the *Odyssey*, living peacefully together in Ithaca after quite enough adventures and misadventures.

The murder of Agamemnon and later history of the Pelopids

Aigisthos and Clytemnestra plot the death of Agamemnon

While Agamemnon, the great king of Mycenae, was away at Troy, his cousin Aigisthos took advantage of his absence to advance his own interests and restore the fortunes of his branch of the Pelopid family. It will be remembered that he had killed Atreus, the father of Agamemnon, to restore the Mycenaean throne to his own father, Thyestes, who had been the first Pelopid to hold it (see pp. 422–3); but Agamemnon had later recovered the throne for the Atreid branch of the family by expelling Thyestes with the help of his brother Menelaos (see p. 424). Aigisthos had thus set to work in the meantime to avenge that setback by seducing Agamemnon's wife CLYTEMNESTRA (Clytaimnestra in Greek) and winning power at Mycenae; and since he and Clytemnestra could not allow Agamemnon to survive when he returned from the war, the king's fate was sealed if they successfully implemented their plans for his destruction, as they were always said to have done.

The story of the murder of Agamemnon is a very ancient myth that is already recounted in the *Odyssey*. It should be kept in mind, however, that Aigisthos would not have been seen as the murderer of Agamemnon's father in the earliest tradition, and that Homer apparently imagined that there had been an orderly transfer of power between the first three Pelopid kings of Mycenae (see p. 425). In the Homeric version of the story, which runs as follows, there is accordingly every indication that Aigisthos was motivated by passion rather than dynastic considerations. While the Greek warriors were exerting themselves at Troy, Aigisthos, who was living at ease in a corner of Argos, kept trying to seduce Clytemnestra, although the king had posted one of his servants, a minstrel, to watch over her, and the gods sent Hermes to Aigisthos to warn him not to court the queen or to kill her husband. He proceeded on his way nonetheless, marooning the minstrel on a desert island and soon persuading Clytemnestra to yield to him; and he then took her into his own house and exercised rule over Mycenae for seven years.¹³⁵ To ensure that he would not be caught by surprise when Agamemnon finally returned, he posted a watchman by the shore and promised him a reward of two talents of gold for news of the king's arrival; and when Agamemnon landed in the Argolid a year later, weeping for joy at his supposed deliverance, the watchman rushed to inform his master. Picking out twenty of his best men, Aigisthos prepared an ambush in his house, and then drove down to the shore in his chariot to invite Agamemnon to a banquet. After the festivities, he felled his unsuspecting guest like an ox at the corn-crib; his followers then crept out of their hiding place to attack Agamemnon's companions, and they

exchanged blows with them until not a man was left alive from either party. As Agamemnon lay dying on the floor, Clytemnestra emerged to kill Cassandra, a captive whom he had brought from Troy as a prize of war (see p. 488). Clytemnestra would have been obliged to keep out of sight until that time because she had no proper occasion to be in the house of Aigisthos. There is no indication in this Homeric account that she had any personal grievance against her husband; Aigisthos murdered Agamemnon out of simple necessity to preserve his ill-gotten power, and Clytemnestra connived in the murder out of loyalty to her lover.¹³⁶

In the later tradition, this story is woven into the broader history of the Pelopid family, and Clytemnestra comes to play a more central and active role. The *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, a great tragedy that gives an unexpected depth to what was originally a simple tale of ambition, adultery, and intrigue, provided what was by far the most influential version of the story. In this play Clytemnestra is a woman of strong and ruthless character who has become the dominant partner in the intrigue. Although Agamemnon must necessarily be killed if the usurper is to maintain his position, as in the earlier tradition, her actions are now also motivated by revenge, for she has hated her husband ever since he ordered the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigeneia before the war (see p. 463). It is she who takes the precautions against Agamemnon's return, appointing a lookout to watch for a beacon-fire announcing the fall of Troy; and she receives the returning conqueror with deceptive enthusiasm at his own palace while Aigisthos remains out of sight. After persuading Agamemnon to enter the palace over a path spread with purple robes, and thus to commit an act of arrogance that is designed to provoke the gods, she incapacitates him in his bath by throwing some clothing around him, and then strikes him down with three blows (presumably sword-blows, although this is not stated). The horror of the murder is in no way diminished by the fact that it takes place off-stage, and that the audience learns of it from Agamemnon's cries and from Clytemnestra's exultant account when she reappears afterwards. Cassandra is also killed by her, as in Homer's version. It is only after the deeds have been committed that Aigisthos finally emerges from his hiding place, and rejoices over the destruction of the house of Atreus.¹³⁷ At the same period or somewhat earlier, Pindar also ascribes the murder of Agamemnon to Clytemnestra, and suggests that she may have been inspired to such fury by the slaughter of Iphigeneia;¹³⁸ and she is already shown as dealing the death-blow in a shield-band from the previous century.

Orestes avenges the murder of Agamemnon with the support of his sister Electra

ORESTES, the only son of Agamemnon, who was still a child at the time of his father's murder, survived this moment of peril because he was smuggled away by his nurse Arsinoe or Laodameia, or by his father's herald Talthybios; or, in other versions, he was sent away by his sister Electra, or had been sent away beforehand by his mother.¹³⁹ He was reared in exile by his maternal uncle Strophios, the king of Crisa near Delphi (see p. 427), who brought him up with his own son Pylades.¹⁴⁰ The two boys established a close friendship, and Pylades accompanied Orestes when

he finally returned to Mycenae to avenge his father's murder. Our earliest source for the latter story, the *Odyssey*, mentions that Orestes returned home as soon as he was old enough, arriving eight years after Agamemnon's death, and avenged his father by killing Aigisthos in his turn; and since the epic also reports that Orestes 'held a funeral feast for the Argives over his hateful mother and the craven Aigisthos', we should probably assume that he killed Clytemnestra too. The Hesiodic *Catalogue* is the first source to state explicitly that he committed matricide, by killing 'his overweening mother with the pitiless bronze'; and Stesichorus indicates at much the same period that he was pursued by the Erinyes (Furies) for doing so.¹⁴¹

The tale of Orestes' revenge takes the following form in the first full account in Aeschylus' *Libation-bearers* (*Choephoroi*). After learning from Apollo at Delphi that he must kill those who have been responsible for his father's murder or else suffer grievously himself, he makes his way to Mycenae together with Pylades. While visiting his father's grave after his arrival to dedicate a lock of his hair, he encounters his sister Electra, who has arrived at the grave with a group of slave-women to pour libations at the order of her mother. Electra explains to her brother, Clytemnestra has been troubled by a sinister dream in which she fancied that she gave birth to a snake (evidently signifying Orestes), which bit her, drawing blood, when she tried to suckle it, and she has therefore ordered that libations should be offered in the hope of averting the portended danger. After approaching Agamemnon's grave with his sister to call on the aid of his father's spirit, Orestes gains entrance to the palace for Pylades and himself by pretending to Clytemnestra (who naturally fails to recognize him) that he is a stranger from Central Greece who has been asked to report the death of Orestes. Once they are inside, Orestes kills Aigisthos, who has been summoned to hear the news, and then turns his sword against Clytemnestra too, even though she tries to deter him by baring her breast and begging him not to kill the mother who had suckled him.¹⁴²

Sophocles and Euripides later wrote tragedies on the same theme in which Orestes' sister plays a fuller and more aggressive role. Sophocles' *Electra* portrays her as having been present when Orestes' childhood attendant (*paidagōgos*) arrived at the palace to allege that Orestes had been killed in a chariot-race, a false report at which she was as much dismayed as her mother was relieved. Now believing that her brother was no longer alive to avenge the murder of Agamemnon, Electra herself sets to work to kill Clytemnestra and Aigisthos, but she is unable to persuade her more cautious sister Chrysothemis (who is rather like Ismene in *Antigone*, see p. 358) to assist her in the enterprise. Orestes and Pylades are already in Mycenae, however, and they soon arrive at the palace, where Orestes makes himself known to Electra, who waits outside to watch out for Aigisthos while her brother kills Clytemnestra inside. When Aigisthos appears, Electra lures him inside by telling him that he will be able to see the body of Orestes, but the corpse that is revealed to him is that of Clytemnestra, and he is killed in his turn by Orestes.¹⁴³

In Euripides' idiosyncratic play of the same title, Aigisthos has forced Electra to marry a poor farmer to make it impossible for any son of hers to be able to claim the throne (although her husband, who is a man of fine character, has refused to consummate the marriage out of respect for her feelings). She has naturally become

embittered, and when Orestes arrives at the farmhouse with his friend, she eagerly assists him in plotting the death of Aigisthos and Clytemnestra; and in the case of the latter she even plays a direct part in the execution of the murder, exhorting her weaker-minded brother when he hesitates, and putting her hand to the sword as he plunges it in. In this version, Orestes commits the murders outside the palace where nobody would be available to protect the victims, killing Aigisthos in the meadows while he is offering a sacrifice to the nymphs, and then killing Clytemnestra in the farmhouse after she has been summoned there on the pretence that Electra has given birth to a son.¹⁴⁴

Orestes is persecuted by the Erinyes

After killing his mother, Orestes was persecuted and driven mad by the Erinyes (Furies), female spirits of vengeance who were especially ruthless in punishing offences committed by one member of a family against another (see p. 26). This was commonly agreed in the post-Homeric tradition at least, for there is no mention of any such trouble in the *Odyssey*, which presents Orestes' actions as exemplary and concentrates on the killing of Aigisthos, never stating directly that he also killed his mother. Athena urges Telemachos, the son of Odysseus, accordingly to take similar action against the rapacious young men who have invaded the house of his absent father, pointing to the fame that noble Orestes has won for killing his father's murderer.¹⁴⁵ Clytemnestra is of interest to Homer primarily as a counter-example to Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus; we should doubtless assume that Orestes, as the only surviving male member of the household, would have been fully justified in taking action against her. The earliest literary evidence for his persecution by the Erinyes is contained in a report on a lost poem by Stesichorus, the *Oresteia*, in which Apollo gave him a bow to defend himself against the Erinyes.¹⁴⁶

The Erinyes come to the fore in the last two plays of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy. At the end of *The Libation-bearers*, soon after Orestes has killed his mother, he exclaims in horror that his mother's Erinyes have appeared to him, saying that they are hunting him down and that he must now pass on;¹⁴⁷ and they form the chorus of the final play in the trilogy, *Eumenides*. At the beginning of that play, we find that Orestes has fled to Delphi to seek the help of Apollo, who had ordered him to commit the murder in the first place. Apollo promises him his protection but tells him to travel on to Athens and submit himself to Athena.¹⁴⁸ Stirred on by the ghost of Clytemnestra, the Erinyes follow him to Athens, where both they and Orestes agree to accept the justice of Athena. The goddess decides the case shall be judged by a panel of twelve Athenian citizens at the court of the Areiopagos,¹⁴⁹ so setting a precedent for trial by jury. Apollo himself appears as the advocate of Orestes; the Erinyes plead their own cause with terrible eloquence; and when the votes of the jury are equally divided, Athena as president of the court uses her casting vote to acquit Orestes,¹⁵⁰ so establishing that an acquittal should be registered if the votes should ever be equal in the future (as was the practice at Athens). To appease the Erinyes, Athena offers them a home in her city of Athens, proposing that they should be worshipped henceforth at the foot of the Acropolis under the new name of the

Eumenides or ‘the Kindly Goddesses’.¹⁵¹

The preceding tale was obviously invented at Athens, whether by Aeschylus himself or some earlier author; but there were also competing traditions in which Orestes was said to have won deliverance from the Erinyes in various parts of the Peloponnese. According to a quite early tale recorded by Pherecydes, Orestes fled to Oresthasion in south-eastern Arcadia, where he sought sanctuary in the temple of Artemis, seating himself as a suppliant on the altar of the goddess. When the Erinyes approached him for the kill, she drove them away accordingly, and the city was renamed Oresteion in commemoration of the incident.¹⁵² Or, in another Arcadian legend set near the site of Megalopolis, the Erinyes manifested themselves in order to drive Orestes mad, appearing to him as wholly black; but when he bit off one of the fingers of his left hand in his frenzy, they suddenly seemed to turn white, and he regained sufficient composure to avert their wrath by burning sacrifices to them. The Erinyes had a local sanctuary at Ale (Cure), the place where this was supposed to have happened.¹⁵³ Or, according to the Troizenian tradition, Orestes was purified from the taint of matricide by nine men of Troizen while seated on a sacred stone outside the temple of Artemis Lyceia; or he was cured of his madness while sitting on a comparable stone near Gythion in Laconia.¹⁵⁴ Or he turned the pitiless Erinyes into the kindly Eumenides by sacrificing a black sheep to them at the Achaean town of Ceryneia (which was later said to have a sanctuary of the Erinyes that had supposedly been founded by Orestes). Such was the way in which stories from myth would be woven into local legend, often in connection with local cults.¹⁵⁵

According to some Hellenistic and later sources, Orestes was arraigned for murder by mortal accusers and then tried in accordance with conventional procedure. In one such version, Clytemnestra and Aegisthos had left a child called Erigone, who prosecuted Orestes at the Areiopagos, either on her own or in conjunction with her grandfather Tyndareos; and she was so distressed by his subsequent acquittal that she hanged herself.¹⁵⁶ Or else Orestes was prosecuted at the same court by Perileos (or Perilaos), son of Icarios, a cousin of Clytemnestra, since Tyndareos was no longer alive to institute proceedings;¹⁵⁷ or Tyndareos himself charged Orestes with murder at Mycenae, but the citizens allowed him to depart into exile out of respect for his father.¹⁵⁸

Orestes recovers his sister Iphigeneia from the land of the Taurians

According to a further tale that first appears in Euripides’ *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, Orestes discovered from Apollo at Delphi that he would not be fully delivered from the Erinyes until he had fetched an ancient statue of Artemis from the land of the Taurians (the Crimea).¹⁵⁹ Although he was unaware of it as yet, his sister IPHIGENEIA was serving there as the priestess of Taurian Artemis; for the goddess had spirited her away to the land of the Taurians when her father had brought her to sacrifice at Aulis. As was described in the preceding chapter, Agamemnon offended Artemis while the Greek army was making preparations for the voyage to Troy at Aulis in Boeotia, and it was revealed by a seer that the goddess would continue to hold the fleet in port until Agamemnon made amends by bringing one of his

daughters to sacrifice (see further on p. 463). If she was either killed or rendered immortal by Artemis, as in other accounts, her earthly life came to an end at that point, but in the distinctive account that is offered by Euripides in this tragedy, she is rescued by Artemis and transferred abroad as a living mortal, and can thus re-enter the history of the Pelopid family and of Greece after she is recovered from her exile by her brother.

She was already associated with the land of the Taurians in the earliest known account of her fate in the *Cypria*, but as a goddess rather than priestess. Although the surviving summary of the epic offers no details on the matter, merely stating that Artemis substituted a deer for her on the altar and ‘transported her to the Taurians and made her immortal’, she was presumably turned into the Taurian maiden goddess who was equated with Artemis, and is served by Iphigeneia as a priestess in Euripides’ play.¹⁶⁰ Herodotus does indeed mention that the Taurian goddess was identified with Iphigeneia.¹⁶¹ It can thus be seen that Euripides started from this earlier tradition, altering it for his own purposes. In another early account from the Hesiodic *Catalogue* (in which this daughter of Agamemnon is called Iphimede), Artemis saved her by placing a phantom (*eidōlon*) of her on the altar, and rubbed her with ambrosia to make her immortal as Artemis Einodia (‘of the wayside’); since Einodia was a title of Hecate, and the early lyric poet Stesichorus is said to have stated that Iphigeneia was turned into that goddess, this may have meant that she became Hecate, an infernal double of Artemis.¹⁶² In a Hellenistic account ascribed to Nicander, Artemis is said to have rendered her immortal under the title of Orsilochia, which is reported to have been a title of Artemis in the Tauric Chersonese. It is suggested here that Artemis substituted a bull (*tauros*) for her at the altar, and that she named the people of her new homeland the Taurians (*Tauroi* in Greek) in commemoration of the fact.¹⁶³

As priestess of Taurian Artemis, Iphigeneia is obliged to preside over the bloody local rites in which any male foreigner who sets foot in the land would be sacrificed to the goddess. So when Orestes and his companion Pylades are captured soon after their arrival, Thoas, the king of the Taurians, orders that they should be taken to Iphigeneia to be slaughtered in the customary manner. On learning that the pair have come from Argos, Iphigeneia offers to release one of them if he will take a message home; and when she explains who she is and asks that her brother should be informed of her predicament, Orestes realizes that she must be his sister, whom he had considered to be dead. After sharing in the joy of their reunion and exchanging news, Iphigeneia sets to work to contrive their escape. She tells Thoas that the captives are polluted because they have killed their mother, and says that they will have to be purified in the sea along with the statue (which has been polluted by their presence) before they can be brought to sacrifice; and she adds that the king himself should remain in the temple during their absence to purify it, and that the local people should be ordered to stay indoors to avoid any danger of pollution. On arriving at the shore at the lonely spot where Orestes’ ship had been secretly moored, Iphigeneia tells the guards to keep at a distance while she performs the purifications, and she is thus able to escape out to sea unhindered with the prisoners and the statue. Athena manifests herself to Thoas at the end of the play to

order him to make no attempt at pursuit, and she reveals that the fugitives will arrive safely in Attica, and that Orestes will dedicate the statue at Halai while Iphigeneia will become the priestess of Artemis at Brauron.¹⁶⁴ In connection with the cult of Artemis Tauropolis at Halai, which was supposed to have been founded by Orestes, the priest used to graze a man's throat with a sword in a rite imitative of the human sacrifice that had once been performed by Iphigeneia, but would restrict himself to drawing a single drop of blood.¹⁶⁵

According to Attic tradition, Iphigeneia served Artemis at Brauron, a town on the east coast of Attica, until the end of her days, and was buried there after her death (although other places, including Megara, also claimed to have her tomb). She received cultic honours as a heroine at her Attic tomb, and it is reported that the clothing of women who died in childbirth (a function that was of special concern to her mistress Artemis) would be dedicated to her.¹⁶⁶ The statue that had supposedly been stolen from the land of the Taurians by herself and her brother could be seen at Brauron in historical times; but, as in the case of the Trojan Palladion, a variety of places claimed to possess it. The Spartans alleged, for instance, that Orestes had brought it to their city when he became king there, and they identified it with their ancient image of Artemis Orthia; or, in an Italian version of the legend, Orestes was said to have deposited it at Aricia in Latium.¹⁶⁷

Hyginus records a tale in which Aigisthos is said to have had a son called ALETES, who seized power at Mycenae during Orestes' absence when a messenger falsely reported that he and his companion had been sacrificed to Taurian Artemis. Electra decided to travel to Delphi to question the oracle about her brother's fate, and happened to arrive there just as Orestes and Iphigeneia arrived following their escape from the land of the Taurians. When the messenger who had previously brought the false message told Electra that Iphigeneia had killed her brother (as she might well have done as the priestess of Taurian Artemis), she seized a firebrand from the altar and would have killed Iphigeneia if Orestes himself had not intervened. After recognizing each other's identity, Orestes and Electra travelled to Mycenae, where Orestes killed Aletes, and would also have killed Erigone, the other child of Aigisthos and Clytemnestra, if Artemis had not rescued her and installed her in Attica as one of her priestesses.¹⁶⁸

The marriage and death of Orestes, and the truncated reign of his son Teisamenos

By killing Aigisthos and recovering his paternal inheritance, Orestes gained control of Mycenae and the section of the Argolid that was ruled from it; and, according to Pausanias' account of the local history of the area, the rest of the Argolid also fell under his control when Cylarabos, son of Sthenelos, who had become the sole ruler of the other lands of the Argolid (see p. 369), died without leaving any children. And he finally inherited Sparta, the other main Pelopid kingdom, when his uncle Menelaos died without an heir.¹⁶⁹

From the classical period onwards, it was generally accepted that Orestes married HERMIONE, the only daughter of Helen and Menelaos, who bore him his son and

heir Teisamenos (i.e. Avenger, so named because Orestes had avenged the murder of Agamemnon). It was accepted at the same time, however, that Hermione was also married to Achilles' son Neoptolemos at some stage. In the *Odyssey*, Menelaos is said to have promised her to Neoptolemos at Troy, and to have fulfilled his promise by sending her to him after the war; and it would seem that he was her only husband in the early tradition, in a childless marriage.¹⁷⁰ The earliest known source for her marriage to Orestes is a lost play by Sophocles, *Hermione*, in which it was stated that Tyndareos, the father-in-law of Menelaos, had given her to Orestes in Sparta during the absence of Menelaos. However, Menelaos took her away from her husband after his return to deliver her to Neoptolemos in accordance with the promise that he had made at Troy; but when Neoptolemos was killed at Delphi soon afterwards while trying to exact reparation from Apollo for the death of his father (see p. 502), Hermione was able to return to Orestes, and bore him his son Teisamneus.¹⁷¹ In subsequent accounts, Orestes is sometimes said to have killed Neoptolemos at Delphi, or to have arranged for him to be killed there, because Hermione had been taken away from him or was not given to him as promised.

The idea that Orestes was responsible for the death of Neoptolemos first appears in Euripides' *Andromache*, and it is quite possible that Euripides first introduced it. We are told in that play that Hermione married Neoptolemos as her first husband and went to live with him in his grandfather's kingdom in southern Thessaly. Because the marriage proved to be childless, she grew increasingly jealous of her husband's concubine Andromache, who had borne him a son (here unnamed, usually Molossos, see p. 501), and even imagined that Andromache was using magic to render her barren. So while Neoptolemos was away on a trip to Delphi, she and her father Menelaos (who had come from Sparta for that purpose) set out to kill Andromache and her son, causing her to send her son away and take refuge at the shrine of Thetis; Menelaos gained hold of Andromache's son, however, and prised her away from her place of sanctuary by threatening to kill him. He and his daughter would then have killed Andromache and her son alike if Peleus, the grandfather of Neoptolemos, had not made an opportune appearance and rescued them. Menelaos then made a hasty departure, leaving Hermione to worry about the reaction of Neoptolemos when he returned to hear of the plot. Orestes, who had been betrothed to her previously, happened to call in at this time as he was travelling north to consult the oracle at Dodona; and on learning of her predicament, he offered to take her away with him, explaining that he had already taken measures to ensure that Neoptolemos would be killed at Delphi. For he hated Neoptolemos for having taken Hermione as his wife when he himself was already betrothed to her.¹⁷² As might be gathered from this summary, Hermione is an unappealing character in this play and her father, Menelaos, is utterly contemptible.

Orestes lived to an advanced age, seventy or even ninety in some accounts, until he finally died from a snakebite at Oresteion in Arcadia.¹⁷³ According to Pausanias, the Delphic oracle had instructed him to leave Mycenae to settle in Arcadia when it was under the rule of Aipyros, son of Hippothoon (see p. 549).¹⁷⁴ Tradition claimed that he was initially buried in or near Tegea in southern Arcadia, but was later reburied at Sparta, where his bones could be seen in historical times.¹⁷⁵ Herodotus

tells how this reburial was supposed to have come about in the sixth century BC. After repeatedly failing to conquer the city of Tegea, the Spartans sought the advice of the Delphic oracle, which told them that they would be victorious if the bones of Orestes were brought home to Sparta; and when they consulted the oracle once again after failing to find the bones, it declared that the bones were lying in a place where two winds blew under strong constraint, and where blow was struck on blow and woe on woe. The meaning of the oracle remained a mystery until a Spartan agent called Lichas happened to call in at a smithy in Tegea while some iron was being hammered out. When the smith remarked to him that he had discovered a huge coffin, ten feet long, while digging a well in the courtyard outside, Lichas reflected on the work that was being carried out in front of him, and suddenly realized that the oracle must have been referring to a smithy, and that the remains in the coffin would therefore be those of Orestes. For the ‘winds’ mentioned in the oracle were the blasts of air that issued from the bellows of the forge, the ‘blows’ were those of the hammer on the anvil, and the ‘woes’ were those that would be inflicted by the iron that was being hammered out (evidently to make weapons of war). So Lichas arranged for the bones to be transferred to Sparta, and Tegea fell under the sway of Sparta soon afterwards just as the oracle had predicted.¹⁷⁶

TEISAMENOS, the son of Orestes, was the last Pelopid to hold power at Argos and Sparta. He reigned as his father’s successor until his reign was brought to an end by the Heraclids and their Dorian allies, when they established themselves in the Peloponnese two generations after the Trojan War (see p. 280). Although he was originally said to have been killed by them in battle, another account was also developed in which he withdrew to Achaea, the northern coastal province of the Peloponnese, after being defeated by them. In that case, he was soon killed nonetheless when he became embroiled in a war there, but his followers proved victorious, see further on p. 379. According to Achaeian tradition, he was buried at Helice in Achaea, where his bones remained until the Spartans, at the order of the Delphic oracle, took them home to Sparta, where his supposed grave could be seen in historical times.¹⁷⁷

Notes

¹ Proclus on *Sack of Troy*.

² Proclus on *Returns*; divergent account of Neoptolemos’ return in Hom. *Od.* 3.188–9.

³ Hom. *Od.* 3.130–58.

⁴ Ibid. 3.159–72.

⁵ Ibid. 3.276–85.

⁶ Ibid. 3.173–83.

⁷ Ibid. 3.276–312; cf. Proclus on *Cypria* (arrives at Egypt with five ships, the others having been destroyed at sea).

⁸ Hom. *Od.* 4.351–586.

⁹ Ibid. 4.78–90.

¹⁰ Ibid. 4.227–32, 125–32.

¹¹ E.g. Apollod. *Epit.* 6.29, Eur. *Helen* respectively.

¹² Conon 8.

¹³ Schol. Aratus 351 (star rises as ships sail south), Str. 1.1.6 (recently named); there was probably a catasterism in the lost *Kanobos* of Apollonius of Rhodes.

- 14 Hom. *Od.* 4.491–511.
- 15 Ibid. 4.512–37.
- 16 Ibid. 4.555–60.
- 17 Ibid. 3.186–92.
- 18 Proclus on *Returns*.
- 19 Mentioned as more recent name in Apollod. *Epit.* 6.11.
- 20 First references to Nauplios' activities, Eur. *Helen* 766–7 (shipwrecks, beacon lit by Nauplios in Euboea), 1126–31 (many lured on to rocks at Cape Caphareus); this was the subject of the *Nauplios Pyrkaos* (Nauplios the Fire-Kindler) of Sophocles, but almost nothing is recorded of the play; Nauplios is mentioned in *Returns* fr. 1 Davies (from Apollod. 2.1.5, that his wife was called Philyra).
- 21 Hom. *Od.* 4.500.
- 22 Hyg. *Fab.* 116, cf. Q.S. 14.419ff.
- 23 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.5–11.
- 24 Schol. *Il.* 13.66, cf. Lyc. 373–402.
- 25 Borrows Zeus's lightning to use it against the Greek ships, Eur. *Troad.* 78–81, Verg. *Aen.* 1.39–45, Q.S. 14.443–540, kills Ajax with thunderbolt, Apollod. *Epit.* 6.6, Hyg. *Fab.* 116.
- 26 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.6.
- 27 Lyc. 398–402 with schol. 402, schol. *Il.* 13.166.
- 28 Hyg. *Fab.* 166.
- 29 See Arist. *Thesm.* 768ff with schol. 771.
- 30 Lyc. 1214–25, Apollod. *Epit.* 6.9.
- 31 Meges and Prothoos, Tzetz. Lyc. 902 (citing 'Apollodorus and the rest' = Apollod. *Epit.* 6.15a); Gouneus, ps.Arist. *Peplos* 25. Cf. schol. Lyc. 899 (Gouneus and Prothoos in Libya), Tzetz. Lyc. 1.c (Gouneus to Libya).
- 32 Proclus on *Returns*.
- 33 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.2, schol. Lyc. 427.
- 34 Schol. *Il.* 2.315, Q.S. 14.360–3 respectively.
- 35 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.3–4; cf. Lyc. 426–30 (similar, but answers not specified), schol. Lyc. 427 (both questions posed by Mopsos; latter reply, ten piglets of which one male).
- 36 Hes. fr. 278 (see Str. 14.1.27).
- 37 Pher. 3F142 (from Str. l.c.); three piglets (or properly ten?) of which one female.
- 38 Conon fr. 6. For a wholly different account of the death of Calchas, see Serv. *Ecl.* 6.72.
- 39 Ps.Arist. *Peplos* 27; Tzetz. Lyc. 980, 1047.
- 40 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.18; settled at Syrnos in Caria, Paus. 3.26.10, Steph. Byz. s.v. Syrna.
- 41 Lyc. 438–42 with schol. 440, Str. 14.5.16; cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 6.19 (Amphilochos, son of Alcmaion, see p. 331, as opposed to the son of Amphiaraios, is here described as Mopsos' partner in the duel, probably by error).
- 42 Thuc. 2.68.
- 43 Hom. *Od.* 4.5–9.
- 44 E.g. Hom. *Il.* 24.488–9, *Od.* 11.494–7.
- 45 Schol. Eur. *Trojan Women* 1128; in the play itself, 1126–9, Peleus is said to have been expelled by Acastus himself. It has been suggested that Cos may be a mistake for Icos, which is mentioned as the burial-place of Peleus in *Anth. Pal.* 7.2.
- 46 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.12–13, schol. *Od.* 3.188.
- 47 Paus. 1.11.1.
- 48 Pi. *Nem.* 7.36–7.
- 49 Schol. *Od.* 3.188, Eustath. on 3.189.
- 50 E.g. Hom. *Il.* 24.488–9, *Od.* 11.494–7.
- 51 Eur. *Trojan Women* 1126–9 with schol. 1128.
- 52 Dictys 6.7–9.
- 53 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.12.
- 54 As in Apollod. *Epit.* 6.13 (succeeded to kingdom after his grandfather was expelled by the sons of Acastus and died). He presumably came to rule in Phthia in the earliest tradition, although the *Odyssey* mentions nothing more than his safe return and his subsequent presence in Phthia, 3.186–9, 4.5–9.
- 55 Hom. *Od.* 4.5–9.
- 56 Pher. 3F64a.
- 57 Soph. *Hermione* as reported in schol. *Od.* 4.4. and Eustath. On *ibid.*
- 58 Pi. *Nem.* 7.40–3 with schol. *ibid.* 62.
- 59 Asclep. 12F15 (in schol. cit.) states that almost all the poets agree that Machaireus was the killer, and names his father as Daïtes. Machaireus also appears as the killer on other versions of the story, e.g.

- Apollod. *Epit.* 6.14. Killed with *machaira*, Pi. *Nem.* 7.42.
- 60 Pi. *Paean* 6.117ff.
- 61 Pher. 3F64a.
- 62 Str. 9.3.9, Apollod. *Epit.* 6.14, Eustath. on *Od.* 4.4. Tried to plunder Delphi, Paus. 10.7.1, schol. Pi.*Nem.* 7.58.
- 63 Eur. *Androm.* 1085–165; killed by Orestes himself, Verg. *Aen.* 3.330–2, Apollod. *Epit.* 6.14, Hyg. *Fab.* 123.
- 64 Hom. *Il.* 5.330–41.
- 65 Lyc. 612–16 with schol. 592, 610, schol. *Il.* 5.412, Eustath. on *ibid.*
- 66 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.9–10.
- 67 Ant. Lib. 37.2–3, Ov. *Met.* 14.457–8, 510–11, Pliny *N.H.* 3.103, Serv. *Aen.* 8.9.
- 68 Schol. Lyc. 592.
- 69 Str. 6.3.9, schol. Lyc. 592 (Argyrippa with etymology).
- 70 Hdt. 7.170, cf. Conon 25, Strabo 6.3.6.
- 71 Ant. Lib. 37.
- 72 Verg. *Aen.* 11.271–7 and Ov. *Met.* 14.484–509 respectively.
- 73 Ps.Arist. *Mirab.* 79.
- 74 Verg. *Aen.* 11.252ff.
- 75 Soph. *Philoct.* 1421–30 (the divine Heracles foretells his fortunate future to him).
- 76 Tzetz. Lyc. 911, Str. 6.1.3 respectively.
- 77 Str. 6.1.3 and Lyc. 911–27 with scholia.
- 78 Tzetz. Lyc. 911, Justin 20.1.16, ps.Arist. *Mirab.* 107 respectively.
- 79 Lyc. 922–6.
- 80 Prob. *Ecl.* 6.31.
- 81 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.10, schol. Lyc. 1093; variant, schol. Lyc. 1223.
- 82 Serv. *Aen.* 3.121, 12.320, Vat. Myth. 1.195, 2.210.
- 83 Ps.Arist. *Mirab.* 108.
- 84 Hom. *Od.* 3.155–65.
- 85 *Ibid.* 9.39–66.
- 86 *Ibid.* 9.196–205.
- 87 Hdt. 4.177, Pliny *N.H.* 5.28.
- 88 Hom. *Od.* 9.67–104.
- 89 *Ibid.* 9.105–465.
- 90 *Ibid.* 9.456–535.
- 91 *Ibid.* 10.1–76.
- 92 *Ibid.* 10.77–132.
- 93 *Ibid.* 10.133–9, cf. Hes. *Theog.* 956–7 (mother named as Perseis).
- 94 Hes. *Theog.* 1011–16 (in a post-Hesiodic section of the poem); Telegonos, also Proclus on *Telegonia*.
- 95 Hom. *Od.* 10.140–498.
- 96 *Ibid.* 11; Anticleia, *ibid.* 152–224.
- 97 *Ibid.* 11.100–37.
- 98 Circe's advice, Hom. *Od.* 12.37–141.
- 99 Hom. *Od.* 12.166–200.
- 100 See e.g. Apollod. 1.7.10, *Epit.* 7.18–19, A.R. 4.891–902, Lyc. 712–13 with schol., Hyg. *Fab.* 125.
- 101 A.R. 4.896–8.
- 102 Ov. *Met.* 5.552–67, Vat. Myth. 1.186.
- 103 Hyg. *Fab.* 141.
- 104 Schol. *Od.* 12.39.
- 105 Lyc. 712–16, cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 7.19, Hyg. *Fab.* 125, 141.
- 106 Lyc. 717–27 with scholia, ps.Arist. *Mirab.* 103.
- 107 Lyc. 717, 732–7 with scholia.
- 108 Hom. *Od.* 12.55 (Circe on Planctai).
- 109 *Ibid.* 12.234–59.
- 110 *Ibid.* 12.83–100, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 199.
- 111 E.g. Sallust *Hist.* 4.27, Serv. *Aen.* 3.420, schol. Lyc. 46; cf. Palaeph. 20 (Scylla originally the name of a pirate ship).
- 112 Ps.Verg. *Ciris* 70–6, schol. Lyc. 46.
- 113 Ov. *Met.* 12.83–100, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 1999; see also Athen. 7.297b. Serv. *Ecl.* 6.74 gives both versions.

- 114 Hom. *Od.* 12.260–425.
- 115 Ibid. 12.426–50.
- 116 Ibid. 5.1–261.
- 117 Ibid. 5.262–493.
- 118 Ibid. Book 6.
- 119 Odysseus among the Phaeacians, Hom. *Od.* 7–8; he recounts his adventures to them, *ibid.* 9–12.
- 120 Hom. *Od.* 13.1–249.
- 121 Ibid. 13.146–84.
- 122 Ibid. 13.392–438
- 123 Ibid. 17–18.
- 124 Ibid. 19; Penelope's tapestry, *ibid.* 138–58.
- 125 Ibid. 21–22.389.
- 126 Ibid. 22.417–77.
- 127 Ibid. Book 23.
- 128 Ibid. 24.205–548.
- 129 Proclus on *Telegonia*, Apollod. *Epit.* 7.34–5.
- 130 Proclus on *Telegonia*, Apollod. *Epit.* 7.35–6, Hyg. *Fab.* 127.
- 131 Schol. *Od.* 11.134.
- 132 Hom. *Od.* 11.134.
- 133 Proclus on *Telegonia*, Apollod. *Epit.* 7.37, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 127 (states that Telemachos and Penelope travelled to Circe's island at the order of Athena, who also proposed the marriages).
- 134 Apollod. *Epit.* 7.38–40.
- 135 Hom. *Od.* 1.35–43 (Aigisthos warned by Hermes), Hom. *Od.* 3.263–75 (maroons minstrel, seduces Clytemnestra).
- 136 Hom. *Od.* 4.513–37, 11.409–34; see also 3.234–5, 4.91–2, 24.96–7, 24.199–200 (passages indicating that Clytemnestra shared in the guilt of the murder); cf. Proclus on *Returns* (merely that Agamemnon murdered by C. and A.).
- 137 Aesch. *Ag.* (watchman, 1ff; trampling of purple, 905–74; the murder as heard by the chorus from outside, 1343ff; Cassandra's account of it, 1372ff; as avenging sacrifice of Iphigeneia, 1412ff; Aigisthos' speech after the murder, 1577ff).
- 138 Pi. *Pyth.* 11.15–22.
- 139 Taken away by nurse, Pi. *Pyth.* 11.16–18, with schol. 25b citing Pherecydes (= 3F144) and Herodorus (= 31F11); by Talthybios, Dictys 6.2; saved by Electra, Soph. *El.* 11–14, 1110–11, 1349–50, Apollod. *Epit.* 6.24, Hyg. *Fab.* 117; sent away by mother, Aesch. *Ag.* 877ff.
- 140 Pi. *Pyth.* 11.34–6, Soph. *El.* 15–16 (best of friends with Pylades), *Iph. Taur.* 916–19 (Strophios married to a daughter of Atreus), Paus. 2.29.4 (married to Anaxibia, sister of Agamemnon, citing Asius = fr. 5 Davies), Apollod. *Epit.* 6.24.
- 141 Hom. *Od.* 3.306–12, Proclus on *Returns* (vengeance of Orestes and Pylades, no details), Hes. fr. 23a.28–30, Stes. 217, Pi. *Pyth.* 11.36–7.
- 142 Aesch. *Libation-Bearers* (Clytemnestra's dream, 523–33, cf. dream in Stes. 219, Soph. *El.* 417–25; Orestes' final confrontation with his mother, 829ff).
- 143 Soph. *Elektra* (*paidagōgos* comes to palace, 660ff.; Electra seeks help of Chrysothemis in killing Aigisthos, 938ff; Orestes and Pylades arrive, 1098ff; killing of Clytemnestra, 1367ff, of A., 1442ff).
- 144 Eur. *Elektra* (E. married to farmer, 19ff; killing of Aigisthos described, 774ff; of Clytemnestra, 1201ff).
- 145 Hom. *Od.* 1.293–300; see also 1.39–44, 3.303–12, 4.546–7, 11.461.
- 146 Stesichorus 217.
- 147 Aesch. *Libation-Bearers* 1048–64.
- 148 Aesch. *Eum.* 64ff.
- 149 Ibid. 470ff.
- 150 Ibid. 734ff.
- 151 Ibid. 804ff.
- 152 Pher. 3F135.
- 153 Paus. 8.34.2–3.
- 154 Paus. 2.31.7, 11 and 3.22.1 respectively.
- 155 Schol. Soph. *Oed. Col.* 42 (sacrifice), Paus. 7.25.4 (sanctuary).
- 156 Apollod. *Epit.* 6.25, Marmor Parium 239F25, Et. Magn. s.v. Aiora (acted with Tyndareos, hanged herself afterwards), Dictys 6.4 (hanged herself).
- 157 Paus. 8.34.4.
- 158 Hyg. *Fab.* 119; mentioned as variant without any details in Apollod. *Epit.* 6.25.

- 159 Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 77–91.
- 160 Proclus on *Cypria*.
- 161 Hdt. 4.103.
- 162 Hes. fr. 23a.17–26, 23b (see Paus. 1.43.1), Stesichorus 215.
- 163 Ant. Lib. 27, following Nicander.
- 164 Eur. *Iph. Taur.* (recognition scene, 769ff; I.’s plan for escape, 1029ff; Athena’s revelations, 1435ff).
- 165 Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 1458–61.
- 166 Ibid. 1462–7.
- 167 At Brauron, Paus. 1.23.9, 1.33.1; at Sparta, Paus. 3.16.7; at Aricia, Serv. *Aen.* 2.116, 6.136.
- 168 Hyg. *Fab.* 122.
- 169 Paus. 2.18.4–5.
- 170 Hom. *Od.* 4.5–9.
- 171 Soph. *Hermione* as reported in schol. *Od.* 4.4 and Eustath. on *ibid.*
- 172 Paus. 2.18.5, reporting Cinaethon (= fr. 4 Davies), 3.2.1 (Penthiolos on Lesbos), Str. 13.1.3.
- 173 Asclepiades 12F25 (seventy at time), Apollod. *Epit.* 6.28; Vell. Pat. 1.1.3 (died at ninety, place not stated).
- 174 Paus. 8.5.4.
- 175 Paus. 8.54.4.
- 176 Hdt. 1.67–8, cf. Paus. 3.3.6.
- 177 Apollod. 2.8.3 (killed in battle), Paus. 7.1.3 (expelled and killed later in Achaea).

Aeneas, Romulus, and the origins of Rome

Many of the legends of early Rome were modelled more or less directly on older stories from Greece, and the same is also true of the relatively few original myths that came to be developed about the Roman gods (mainly by Ovid in the surviving literature); but even if the associated bodies of legend were partly of a hybrid nature as a consequence, they belong to the Roman tradition rather than the Greek and must be interpreted in relation to Roman concerns, and therefore lie beyond the scope of a survey of Greek myth. Of rather greater relevance are the Roman aetiological tales that added a Roman extension to Greek myth by bringing Greek heroes in person to Rome or the surrounding area. We have had occasion to refer to a remarkable appendix to the legend of Hippolytos, son of Theseus, in which it was claimed that he had been transferred to Latium after his death and revival to become a cultic associate of Diana, the local equivalent of his patron goddess Artemis, at her sacred grove at Aricia (see p. 311). To explain another feature of the grove, it was also suggested that Orestes deposited the statue of Taurian Artemis there after stealing it from its original home with the help of his sister Iphigeneia (see p. 518). It inevitably came to be imagined that Heracles, who was honoured in Roman cult as Hercules, might have called in at the site of Rome while he was travelling through Italy with the cattle of Geryon, and Roman authors took advantage of this possibility to propose that his most ancient cult had come to be founded there on the occasion of his visit (see p. 252). As we saw in connection with that legend, the site of the future city was said to have been ruled at this time by a Greek, Evander, who had left his native city of Pallantium in Arcadia to settle on the Palatine hill. By far the most important legend of this kind, however, or rather body of legend, is the one that presented AINEIAS, a Trojan hero from Greek myth, as having travelled to the Italian West after the fall of Troy, to become connected, in a crucial fashion if at some remove, with the origins and founding of Rome itself, according to traditions that won general acceptance there.

Greek legends that associated Aineias with the founding of Rome, and their chronological

implausibility

As was described at the end of [Chapter 21](#), most of the surviving members of the Trojan royal family, men and women alike, met their death either during the sack of Troy or shortly afterwards. Very few survived to travel elsewhere or to be taken elsewhere. Of the women, Priam's daughter Cassandra was taken to Mycenae by Agamemnon, only to be swiftly murdered by his wife Clytemnestra, while Hector's wife Andromache became a concubine of Achilles' son Neoptolemos in his newly won kingdom in Epirus. Priam's only surviving son Helenos, who had become estranged from the other Trojans and had fallen into the hands of the Greeks before the fall of the city, also accompanied Neoptolemos to north-western Greece and later married Andromache in some accounts.

In the early tradition a special destiny was reserved for Aineias, as the leading member of the junior branch of the Trojan royal family, precisely because Priam's branch of the family met with such complete destruction. He was preserved through the will of the gods because someone needed to be available to rule at Troy in the future, after the city recovered to some degree and life resumed its normal course; see further on p. 446. If later tradition presented him as having travelled abroad to found a Trojan colony in another land, that represented a complete reversal of his original function in myth. As a result of his acknowledged survival, however, he was available nevertheless to be transferred abroad as the mythical tradition evolved; and as we have seen in connection with the return voyages of the Greek heroes of the war, some came to be credited with a further career in distant parts even though that stood in direct conflict with the early epic tradition (see pp. 503ff.). In the case of Aineias, the change was eased by the fact that no specific stories seem have been related in the early tradition about his life after the fall of Troy. Largely to explain the origins of local cults and dedications, or of place names that seemed to have some connection with him, it came to be suggested quite early that Aineias had settled in neighbouring Thrace, or even in a variety of places in Greece itself; and the fateful suggestion then came to be made that he had travelled even further abroad to Italy.

Much as one would like to be able to trace how the Italian legend of Aineias first developed within the Greek tradition, the surviving evidence is so inadequate that this is no longer possible. Inscriptions on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*, an Italian limestone relief dating from about 15 BC, seem to suggest that Stesichorus, a Greek-Sicilian poet of the sixth century BC, already presented Aineias as sailing off to Hesperia (i.e. the Italian West);¹ but it has been convincingly argued on a variety of grounds that we cannot rely on this monument for reliable information on what Stesichorus may have said about Aineias. Quite apart from anything else, if the poet had really presented him as sailing to Greece, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who was well acquainted with his works, could hardly have failed to mention it in his detailed survey of Aineias' Italian legend. The mythographer Hellanicus (fifth century BC) is the next earliest putative source for the story, since Dionysius cites him as having written that Aineias sailed to Italy with Odysseus and became the founder of Rome, naming it after one of the Trojan women who had accompanied him, a certain

Rhōmē, who grew weary of their long wanderings and brought them to an end in Latium by inciting the other women to set fire to the Trojan ships.² Once again, alas, there is ample reason to doubt the reliability of the attribution, both on internal grounds and because Dionysius himself also ascribes a conflicting story to Hellanicus in which Aineias settled closer to home at Pallene, on the northern shores of the Aegean.³

Whatever the true origin of the story above in which Aineias founded Rome and named it after Rhōmē, it is characteristic of the facile pseudo-legends that were invented by Greek authors to account for the origin of Rome (as of other foreign cities). Some thirty stories of the kind are recorded from the Hellenistic and early Roman period, not all involving Aineias. To Greeks who were versed in the legendary lore of their own land, it seemed self-evident that just as Corinth was named after Corinthos, or Chaironeia after Chairon, or Cyrene after a nymph called Cyrene, so Rome must have been named after someone called Rhōmē or Rhomos or the like.⁴ As the next stage in the process, it was necessary that some kind of pedigree or origin should be ascribed to the chosen eponym, and that appropriate circumstances should be imagined for the founding of the city that was supposedly named after that person. For a far-off place like Rome, no detail was required in the latter connection, and certainly none that demanded any knowledge of the local traditions and topography. In foundation-stories of this nature in which Rhōmē is selected as the eponym, she is usually linked to Aineias in one way or another, whether as a companion of his as above, or as his wife, or as the wife or daughter of his son Ascanios. In that case, the city could be said to have been founded by Aineias or Ascanios and named in her honour.⁵ If it was founded by the male equivalent Rhomos, who is sometimes described as being a son or grandson of Aineias, he could be said to have founded the city itself.

Some thirty stories of this kind are recorded from the Hellenistic and early Roman period, by no means all of them involving Aineias. Rhōmē has no connection with him in some accounts, being described, for instance, as a captive who had been brought from Troy by Greek warriors, or as a daughter of Euandros (Evander in Latin), an Arcadian who was supposed to have established himself on the site of Rome;⁶ and Rhomos for his part was sometimes said to have been a son of Odysseus and Circe, or of Emathion, or indeed of Italos, the eponym of Italy.⁷ As the final example indicates, the eponym or founder may be given a native pedigree. We thus also hear of a certain Romis, tyrant of the Latins, who drove the Etruscans from the area to found the new city,⁸ or we are told on the contrary that it was founded by some Pelasgians (aboriginals) who named it Rome in commemoration of their military strength (*rhomē*, a purely Greek etymology);⁹ but that is quite enough of this nonsense. Most of these Greek accounts of the founding of Rome are either anonymous or are ascribed to obscure writers who are not easily datable. If it is accepted that the account ascribed to Hellanicus is of doubtful origin, the earliest datable version is one that is recorded for a minor historian called Callias, who would have been writing at around 300 BC (see p. 540).

It continued to be accepted that Aineias had some connection with the origin of Rome long after these facile inventions had fallen by the wayside, but the idea that

the city was directly founded by Aineias, or by an associate or immediate descendant of his, was a purely Greek idea that never seems to have been taken very seriously at Rome itself. In the surviving Roman literature, no author apart from the historian Sallust ever refers to him as founder.¹⁰ Some have argued, to be sure, that the Romans did regard him as their founder in early times, adopting him as such under Etruscan influence before putting him aside for Romulus, but this is a hazardous speculation in the absence of any definite evidence from the city itself, whether literary or archaeological. The Romans developed a foundation-myth of their own in any case, in which the founding was ascribed to Romulus, a Latin prince from Alba Longa. It is generally believed nowadays that this was a legend of indigenous origin and respectable antiquity, perhaps dating back to the sixth century BC; and it is known for certain that the story was well established by the end of the fourth century (see p. 540). In contrast to the Greek stories mentioned above, which would never have been more than rudimentary, this Roman legend was rich in content and grew ever more so, making extensive reference to the local topography and traditions, and embracing many local aetiologies. It overshadowed all other stories of the kind, leaving them as no more than historical curiosities; for not only was it bound to impose itself at the expense of arbitrarily invented foreign stories, but chronological research showed ever more clearly that Rome could not possibly have been founded by Aineias or a near contemporary of his as most Greek stories suggested.

On any rational chronology, Rome must have been founded considerably later than the period immediately following the fall of Troy (i.e. the closing stages of the era of legend in Greece). The historian Timaeus (died c. 260 BC), a Greek-Sicilian who had a good knowledge of the local traditions in Italy, dated the founding of Rome to 814 BC, while Roman antiquaries during the following two centuries came to favour a somewhat later date, finally accepting Varro's estimate of 754/3 BC as canonic. By any calculation, the heroes of Trojan legend must have lived in a remoter antiquity than this. According to the most widely accepted chronology, as developed by Eratosthenes of Alexandria in the third century BC, Troy fell in 1184 BC (towards the end of the Mycenaean period in our reckoning, which seems appropriate enough). If a connection was to be established between Aineias and the founding of Rome, this meant that there was a gap of at least four centuries to be filled between the time of his arrival in Italy and the actual foundation of the city.

Although it might be imagined that Aineias could easily have fallen out of the picture as a result of these developments, things actually turned out quite differently, and a crucial role came to be ascribed to him in the long course of events that led up to the founding of the city. For in what came to be accepted as the standard Roman account of its prehistory, the founder Romulus, who would originally have had no connection whatever with Aineias or Troy, was viewed as being a fairly distant descendant of Aineias who founded Rome many generations after his Trojan forebear had emigrated to that area; and in the formation of this hybrid Greco-Roman body of myth, an elaborate prehistory and full genealogies were developed to fill the gap, involving three different cities in Latium, the region on the east side of Italy in which Rome would finally be planted. On arriving in Latium, Aineias established himself

there with his Trojan followers after some initial conflict with the native Italians, and founded the city of **Lavinium** as his new home not far from the site of his landing. His son and successor Ascanios (or Ascanius in Latin) did not remain at Lavinium, however, but ventured further inland to found **Alba Longa**, about twelve miles south-east of the site of Rome. Descendants of Aeneas then ruled Alba for some twelve generations, until Romulus was born into the family under perilous circumstances after his father had been excluded from his rightful throne. Romulus survived nevertheless, with his twin brother Remus, to restore him to the Alban throne, and then went on to found the new city of **Rome**, peopling it initially with Alban settlers.

Aeneas' travels and arrival in Latium as described by Vergil

The Roman legend of Aeneas may be approached most conveniently through the *Aeneid*, which tells how he wandered to the west after the destruction of Troy and established himself in Latium. We may call him AENEAS henceforth in accordance with Latin usage, and follow the same procedure when referring to other figures from Greek legend who appear in the story.

After the fall of Troy, Aeneas and other Trojan survivors constructed a fleet of ships and sailed off to seek a new home. Although Aeneas initially wanted to settle nearby on the southern coast of Thrace, Polydorus, a son of Priam who had been treacherously murdered there (see p. 488), spoke up from his grave to warn him to forsake that savage land. So he sailed southward, calling in next at the holy island of Delos, where he received a friendly welcome from the priest-king Anius (see p. 461). When Aeneas entered the temple of Apollo to pray for guidance, a supernatural voice ordered him and his followers to seek out the land of their ancestors, declaring that his descendants were destined to rule the world from it. On being reminded by his father Anchises that Troy had originally been settled from Crete by Teucer (Teucros, see p. 441), he led his fellow Trojans to that island and proceeded to found a city there, but the newcomers were soon afflicted by a famine and a plague. The significance of this was revealed when the family gods of Aeneas appeared to him in a dream one night and told him that Delian Apollo had not intended him to settle in Crete but rather in Italy, for that had been the original homeland of his ancestor Dardanus, the founder of the Trojan royal line. Although Dardanus was supposed to have crossed over from Samothrace in the Greek tradition (see p. 441), Vergil is referring to an Etrusco-Roman story in which he was presented as having come from Corythus in Etruria (apparently Tarquinii, though often identified with Cortona).¹¹

As the Trojans were sailing west from Crete, they were caught by a storm and driven in a north-westerly direction around the Peloponnese to the little islands of the Strophades, where they were confronted by the Harpies, fierce bird-like creatures with women's faces (see p. 52), who pillaged and fouled their food much as in the legend of Phineus (see p. 403). When these pests were finally driven off, their leader, Celaeno, cast fear into the Trojans by telling them that Apollo had revealed that

hunger would drive them to 'eat their tables' before they would be able to found their Italian city. The meaning of these enigmatic words will become apparent shortly.¹² The wanderers called in next at Epirus in north-western Greece, where they found that Helenus, a son of Priam, was now ruling the kingdom that had been established there by Neoptolemus (see further on p. 501), and was married to Hector's widow Andromache. He had assuaged his nostalgia for his homeland by building an imitation of the Trojan citadel and by naming features of the landscape after corresponding features at Troy. Through his powers as a seer, he was able to advise Aeneas about his forthcoming journey, telling him above all that he should found his new city where he saw a huge white sow lying on the ground suckling thirty piglets. While making his way to that place, which would be located somewhere on the far coast of Italy, he should visit the Sibyl of Cumae, who would be able to reveal more about the ordeals that awaited him in Italy.¹³

Aeneas and his followers then sailed around the foot of Italy and the southern shores of Sicily, narrowly avoiding the whirlpool Charybdis and observing Polyphemus and other Cyclopes from afar (for it was supposed in the later tradition that the Homeric Cyclopes had lived in Sicily). When the voyagers arrived at Drepanum on the western corner of Sicily, they received a hospitable reception from a local ruler called Acestes, who was of Trojan descent as we will see. The aged Anchises died soon afterwards and was buried there.¹⁴ Aeneas set sail for western Italy in the following year, but the goddess Juno (the Roman equivalent of Hera), who had long hated the Trojans, persuaded Aeolus, the ruler of the winds, to unleash a violent storm in the hope of wrecking the fleet; but though some of the ships were destroyed, Neptune calmed the storm, and Aeneas made for the nearest shore with the seven surviving vessels, making a safe landfall on the African coast near Carthage. The newly established city was ruled by its founder, Dido, a Phoenician princess from Tyre, who welcomed the seafarers to her city and fell desperately in love with Aeneas at the incitation of Venus. On finding himself alone with her when the two of them entered the same cave to escape a thunderstorm while out hunting, he embarked on a love affair with her; but after he had tarried with her for some months, Jupiter sent Mercury (the Roman equivalent of Hermes) to him to recall him to his appointed task. He responded to the call of duty and prepared to set off, ignoring the pleas of Dido, who killed herself with his sword after his departure.¹⁵

After arriving back in Sicily, Aeneas held funeral games in honour of his father on the anniversary of his death. The Trojan women, who had grown tired of their endless wanderings, set fire to the ships at the incitation of Juno while the games were under way; but Aeneas prayed for the assistance of Jupiter, who sent a rainstorm to douse the flames, and all but four of the ships were saved. Leaving his older and weaker followers behind to found the city of Acesta (i.e. Segesta) under the leadership of Acestes, Aeneas now set out for Italy once again.¹⁶

A most interesting body of legend was developed in connection with the founding of Segesta (known as Aigesta or Egesta in Greek), an important Hellenized city of non-Greek origin in the north-west of the island. Its eponym Acestes, or AIGESTES in Greek, who already held power in the area at the time of Aeneas' arrival, was himself of Trojan descent, having come to be born on the island to a Trojan mother

in the following circumstances. When Poseidon had sent the sea-monster against Troy during the reign of Laomedon (see p. 443), an oracle from Apollo had declared that maidens of noble birth should be exposed to it, prompting many Trojan noblemen to send their daughters abroad. Among them there was a certain Hippotes or Hippostratos, who sent his daughter Egesta (or Segesta) far away to a safe distance in Sicily, where Crimisos, the god of a local river, had intercourse with her in the form of a bear or a dog, and so caused her to conceive Aigestes.¹⁷ Or, in a somewhat different version, a certain Phainodamas urged his fellow Trojans to expose the king's daughter Hesione to the monster, so enraging the king that he entrusted the three daughters of Phainodamas to some sailors, ordering that they should be exposed as prey to wild beasts on Sicily, where Crimisos caused one of them to conceive Aigestes by having intercourse with her in the form of a dog.¹⁸ As the child of a Trojan mother, Aigestes (or Acestes) naturally offered a friendly welcome to Aeneas, who in turn thought him a suitable leader for the men whom he left behind to found the new city.

To return to the wanderings of Aeneas, he called in at Cumae, just to the north of the Bay of Naples, when he first reached the Italian coast, in accordance with the advice that he had received from Helenus, and the Cumaean Sibyl delivered prophecies to him there about his future adventures in Latium. In response to his urgent request, she agreed to guide him down to the Underworld for a reunion with his dead father. His journey through the different regions of the Underworld has already been described (see pp. 111–12).¹⁹ At the end of it, his father was able to encourage him by offering him a preview of the glorious destiny of his family and of Rome. After he escaped back into the upper world, he and his followers sailed up the coast to the mouth of the Tiber and landed in Latium. As they were eating an improvised meal in the open air nearby, seated on the grass and using flat cakes of bread as platters, they felt so hungry that they finished off by eating the platters themselves, causing the son of Aeneas to joke that they were even devouring their tables; and on hearing his words, Aeneas suddenly realized that the Harpy's prophecy had been fulfilled and that they had therefore discovered their new homeland. And before long, he found the sow and thirty piglets that had been foretold by Helenus as indicating the site of his new home city of Lavinium.²⁰

Since Latinus, the aged king of Latium, had been advised by an oracle to marry his daughter Lavinia to a foreigner, he welcomed the envoys of Aeneas and let them know that he was willing to accept him as a friend and quite possibly as his son-in-law also. Before matters could be taken any further, however, Juno intervened once again by sending the Fury Allecto to the area to stir up trouble against the Trojans. Allecto inspired a fierce hatred for them in Amata, the wife of Latinus, and likewise in Turnus, prince of the Rutulians, who had been the favoured suitor of Lavinia up until that time; and when the Fury then incited Ascanius, the son of Aeneas, to shoot a pet stag that belonged to the royal family, open warfare ensued. Aeneas found himself confronted by a confederation of the Latins, the Rutulians, and the followers of Mezentius, a tyrannous Etruscan ruler who had been exiled from his native city of Caere.²¹ He acquired some allies of his own, however, including Tarchon, an Etruscan king who had learned from a diviner that he would defeat his enemy

Mezentius if he took a foreigner as his leader, and Evander, the ruler of the present inhabitants of the site of Rome. Since Evander was too old to fight on his own account, he provided a force of cavalry under the command of his son Pallas. Latinus stood apart from the conflict. After fierce fighting and various shifts of fortune, Aeneas defeated his opponents, sealing his victory by killing Turnus in single combat (the culminating episode that marks the end of the *Aeneid*). He then proceeded to marry Latinus' daughter after making peace on terms that were very favourable to the conquered Latins, who were to retain their names and customs but to accept the gods and sacred rites that Aeneas had brought to their land.

Latinus (or Latinos in Greek), the eponym of Latium and the Latins, is a quite ancient figure who is mentioned at the end of Hesiod's *Theogony*, in a section of the poem that was probably added in the sixth century BC. He is there described as a son of Odysseus and Circe who, in company with his brother Agrios, 'ruled over the famous Tyrrhenians [i.e. Etruscans] very far away in a nook of the holy islands'.²² It is clear that the author of these verses had only the haziest knowledge of the geography of the area, having no idea of the nature of Italy as a land that projects from the continent to which Greece itself belongs. Various different accounts were offered of the descent of Latinus in the subsequent tradition, with some authors giving him a native pedigree by describing him as a son of Faunus, a rustic godling who was equated with the Greek god Pan.²³

Since the story of Aeneas' conflict with the Italians had no foundation either in history or in any old tradition, different authors could remodel it to suit themselves, and the role of Latinus varies accordingly. In presenting him as an old man who takes no part in the fighting, Vergil departs from the earlier tradition. In Cato's version, Latinus granted a friendly reception to the Trojans, allocating land to them and offering his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas, but waged war against them when they subsequently broke faith with him by raiding Latin territories, and formed an alliance for that purpose with Turnus, lord of the Rutulians, who bore a grudge against Aeneas for having married Lavinia; both he and Latinus met their death in the ensuing conflict.²⁴ Or, in Dionysius' account, Latinus was fighting a war against the Rutulians at the time of the Trojans' arrival but broke it off to march against the foreigners. On the night before he was due to engage them in battle, however, both he and Aeneas were visited in their sleep by gods who instructed them to reach a peaceful settlement. So Latinus granted territory to the Trojans, who then became his allies and helped him to defeat the Rutulians.²⁵

Although the *Aeneid* ends with Aeneas' victory over his Italian foes, and so deals only with the first stage in the long course of events that would eventually lead to the founding of Rome, the destiny that lies in wait for him and his descendants is not merely presupposed but is explicitly foretold within the poem. It is indicated that he will found his city of Lavinium in accordance with the sign foretold for him by Helenus; and shortly before he discovers the sow and thirty piglets, the god of the river Tiber explains to him that the sign means that his son Ascanius will found Alba thirty years after the founding of Lavinium.²⁶ While Aeneas is making his visit to the Underworld, furthermore, his dead father Anchises offers him a vision of the future of his family and of Rome by telling him of the destinies that await various souls

who are due to be reborn into earthly bodies.²⁷ Anchises points first to Silvius, the posthumous son of Aeneas who will found the line of kings that will rule in Alba Longa;²⁸ and he then identifies a few of these kings by name before pointing to Romulus as the divinely fathered member of the family who will found Rome itself.²⁹ The pageant continues with the legendary kings of Rome and a selection of its foremost men down to Julius Caesar and Augustus (who claimed to be descended from Aeneas as we will see).

Aeneas' city of Lavinium, and his death and apotheosis

Lavinium was an old Latin city, which lay near the coast about seventeen miles south of Rome, at the site of the modern Pratica di Mare; Aeneas was said to have named it after his second wife Lavinia. Although the city's Trojan legend was presumably quite ancient, nothing is known for certain about its time of origin. The Greek-Sicilian historian Timaeus, who visited Lavinium in the first half of the third century BC to investigate its antiquities, provides the earliest definite evidence for Aeneas' connection with the town. It had become accepted by that time that Aeneas had not only founded the city itself but had deposited his household gods there to found its 'Trojan' cult of the Penates; Timaeus was shown the earthenware pots in which he was supposed to have transported them from Troy.³⁰ Knowledge of Aeneas must have reached the area considerably earlier, whether by way of Etruria, where he was well known by the end of the sixth century BC, or of the Greek colonies in the south; but archaeological investigations have failed to provide any unequivocal early evidence for his presence in Lavinium. After first stepping ashore in Latium, Aeneas and his followers were said to have camped at a place called Troia, which lay a few miles down the coast between Lavinium and Ardea.³¹ If the place had acquired its name before the legend of Aeneas had become established in the area, as is certainly possible from a linguistic point of view, its presence may have suggested or at least encouraged the idea that Aeneas had settled in the vicinity.

In the *Aeneid*, as we have seen, Aeneas was told by the seer Helenus that he should found his city at the place where he found a large white sow with thirty young. Or in the accounts offered by Dionysius and Diodorus,³² which seem to reflect the influence of Greek tales of animal-guides (as in the Theban foundation-legend, see p. 332), Aeneas was advised by an oracle that a four-footed animal would lead him to the site of his city; and when a pregnant white sow escaped as he was bringing it to sacrifice after his landing and then fled to a certain hill where it gave birth to thirty young, he called the oracle to mind and resolved to found his city there. In what was perhaps the earliest form of the myth, the thirty piglets symbolized the thirty cities that would subsequently form the Latin League;³³ but the number was more commonly thought to have a chronological significance. In the version ascribed to the Roman historian Fabius Pictor (writing in about 200 BC or slightly earlier), Aeneas received a vision in his sleep that ordered him to delay the founding of his city for thirty years in accordance with the number of the piglets.³⁴ Or in the *Aeneid*, the god of the Tiber appeared to him in his sleep on the night before he saw the portent, and explained that it indicated that he should found

Lavinium at that site while his son Ascanius should found Alba thirty years later.³⁵ In that case, it could be said that Alba was named after the white (*alba*) sow.³⁶ Whether or not the story of the sow originated as a genuine local legend, it certainly came to be accepted at Lavinium as a highly valued feature of the city's foundation-legend. The antiquarian Varro, writing in the first century BC, reports that there were not only statues of the sow and its young in the town but that the corpse of the sow itself could be seen there, pickled in brine.³⁷

The grave and shrine of Aeneas could be seen near Lavinium beside a local stream, the Numicus or Numicius. He was honoured there as a minor deity under the name of Aeneas Indiges, having displaced the former occupant of the shrine, who had been called Pater Indiges or the like. According to Dionysius, there was a mound of no great size surrounded by a handsome and neatly ordered grove of trees, and the shrine was marked with the following inscription: 'to the father and god of the locality, who presides over the waters of the river Numicius'.³⁸ It was said that Aeneas had disappeared into the waters of the stream, evidently because his shrine was set on its bank; or in rationalistic accounts, it could be explained that he had simply been carried away by the stream after being killed in battle beside it. A fourth-century BC shrine set in a tumulus near Lavinium has sometimes been identified with the shrine of Aeneas, but this is highly questionable, especially since the excavated site is not situated near a stream. Although Aeneas was not honoured as a hero or god in Roman cult, the Augustan poets tell of his apotheosis. In the *Aeneid*, Jupiter announces to his mother Venus (the Roman goddess equated with Aphrodite) that he is destined to be raised up to the heavens as a god; and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Venus prepares for his apotheosis by asking the god of the Numicius to wash every mortal element out of his corpse.³⁹

There were long-established cultic connections between Rome and Lavinium. In accordance with a practice, which may well have been inaugurated when the Romans first gained control over Lavinium, a party of senior magistrates and priests would travel from Rome each year to perform various traditional rites in the town, above all to offer sacrifices to Vesta and the Penates.⁴⁰ Vesta was the goddess of the hearth, the Italian equivalent of Hestia (see p. 124), while the Penates were deities who had originated as guardian-spirits of the store-room (*penus*). They and the goddess were honoured both in domestic cult as protectors of the household in accordance with their original nature, and in public cult as deities of wider importance who watched over the city and state. Now the Romans believed that their state Penates, the *Penates publici*, had come from Lavinium, and that they could be identified with the Trojan gods who had been established there by Aeneas. There may have been a measure of truth in this, to the extent that the state cult of the Penates may have been introduced from Lavinium or at least reorganized in connection with the Lavinian cult.

Ascanius, son of Aeneas, and the founding of Alba Longa

The founding of Alba Longa marks the next stage in the legend. In contrast to Lavinium, Alba had once been a powerful place, and it was believed that Rome and various other Latin cities had been founded from it. Since Roman tradition stated accordingly that the founder Romulus was of Alban descent, any linkage with Aeneas and the Trojans had to be established by way of Alba, by making Romulus and his Alban forebears descendants of Aeneas. Through the harmonization of Greek, Roman, and Laviniate traditions, the canonic pattern was thus established in which Aeneas founded **Lavinium** while his son Ascanius founded **Alba** and his descendant Romulus founded **Rome**. It is not necessary to assume that Alba Longa (which was destroyed by the Romans at quite an early period) ever had a Trojan legend of its own in the same way as Lavinium. If Alban families at Rome such as the Julii and Cloelii claimed Trojan descent, it is surely more probable that this was a late development inspired by antiquarian lore than an ancient claim rooted in Alban tradition.

ASCANIOS (known as Ascanius in Latin) was taken over from the Greek tradition. Although Homer makes no mention of him or indeed of any son of Aineias (referring only to an Ascanios who was a Bithynian ally of the Trojans⁴¹), it is reasonable to assume that he was already named in early epic as Aineias' heir. Aineias certainly had such an heir in the early tradition since the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* presents the goddess as telling Anchises that his son (i.e. Aineias) and descendants will rule among the Trojans⁴²; and Ascanios is the name that is invariably given to this son of Aineias from the classical period onwards. When it came to be imagined that Aineias had settled abroad after the fall of Troy rather than staying to rule in the Troad, Ascanios was naturally said to have accompanied him, and he was thus available to become the founder of Alba in Italian legend. In the usual tradition, as would be expected, Aeneas was said to have fathered Ascanios by his Trojan wife, who was originally known as Eurydice, but later as Creousa (or Creusa in Latin form, as in the *Aeneid*).

Various explanations were put forward to account for Ascanius' action in leaving Lavinium to found a new city. In the version favoured by Vergil and Dionysius, he founded Alba thirty years after the founding of Lavinium because his father had received a prophecy revealing that the portent of the sow and her thirty piglets indicated that he should do so.⁴³ Or, according to an alternative tradition, he decided to leave Lavinium because trouble arose between him and his father's Italian widow. For Lavinia, who was pregnant at the time of her husband's death, fled into the woods for fear of her stepson's jealousy, and gave birth to her child there, who was known as Silvius ('he of the woods') as a consequence; and since Ascanius met with hostility from the people of Lavinium as a result of the queen's plight, he invited her back to take over the throne and went off to found a new city of his own.⁴⁴

Livy records a significantly different version of the family history in which Ascanius was borne to Aeneas in Italy by his Italian wife Lavinia, and Silvius was a son of Ascanius rather than of Aeneas. Having been born at a later period than in the usual version, Ascanius was too young to take over the throne at the time of his father's death, Lavinius ruled on his behalf as regent until he came of age; and when

he eventually left Lavinium, which had become overcrowded, to found a new city of his own, he restored it to the capable charge of his mother.⁴⁵ To understand why this account probably came to be developed, it is necessary to consider a further and most interesting aspect of Ascanius' Italian legend. Julius Caesar belonged to the gens Julia, a family of Alban origin, as did Augustus too through his mother's line and by adoption, and the Julian family claimed descent from Ascanius by equating him with Iulus, the legendary founder of their line. For it was explained in this connection that Ascanius had been known as Ilus (i.e. man of Ilion or Troy) during his Trojan years, and that this alternative name of his was altered slightly to Iulus in his new homeland. Now if Aeneas fathered Ascanius by his Italian wife, as in the version just recounted, rather than by his wife at Troy as in the standard tradition, Ascanius could not be identified with Iulus on those grounds, which would seem to suggest that this may have been an anti-Julian version that was developed to exclude the identification.

Since Ascanius might have been expected to take his household gods with him, a story was devised to explain why the 'Trojan' cult of the Penates remained in Lavinium. Although Ascanius ordered that a special temple should be constructed for them at Alba and proceeded to install them there, they fled back to their previous home of their own accord during the night; for it was discovered on the following morning that they had disappeared even though the doors of the temple had been kept shut and the walls and roof remained intact, and it was reported soon afterwards from Lavinium that they were standing once again on their original pedestals. And when they ran back to their original home for a second time, they were allowed to remain there, and 600 men were sent back with their families to attend to their cult.⁴⁶ There is otherwise nothing to report about the founding of Alba or indeed about Ascanius' reign as a whole.

The Albam dynasty of the Silvii

Even though it was accepted that Ascanius had founded Alba Longa, its ruling dynasty was said to have been founded by his half-brother Silvius, who inherited the throne from him after his death.⁴⁷ This division of labour may have been introduced because Silvius was born to an Italian mother, and the Alban kings and ultimately Romulus could thus be regarded as having been equally of Latin and Trojan origin if he was founder of the line. It was explained accordingly that he succeeded to the Alban throne because Ascanius had no children of his own. Or else Ascanius had a son called Iulus or Iulius who laid claim to the throne after his death, but the Albans elected Silvius instead, preferring to appoint Iulus to priestly authority.⁴⁸

From the time of Silvius onwards, the throne passed peacefully from father to son until Numitor, the grandfather of Romulus, was forcibly excluded by his younger brother, and the sequence of events that would lead to the founding of Rome was thus set in train. For reasons already indicated, most antiquarians came to believe that more than four centuries must have elapsed between the arrival of Aeneas and the founding of Rome, and a long line of Alban kings was therefore fabricated to fill the gap. Although the surviving catalogues differ from one another to some extent,

all agree that Romulus was separated from Aeneas by some fifteen generations. Nothing is known for certain about the source of the original king-list, but it is reasonable to assume that it was compiled around the third century BC rather than much earlier or later. In Livy's account, the following kings are said to have ruled as the successors of Ascanius and Silvius: Aeneas Silvius, Latinus Silvius, Alba, Atys, Capys, Capetus, Tiberinus, Agrippa, Romulus Silvius, Aventinus, and Numitor's father Proca.⁴⁹ Such a list could hardly be anything other than highly artificial, and it will be apparent at first sight that most of these names were either recycled from elsewhere in the tradition, as in the case of the first two, or else invented as eponyms of suitable places or geographical features.

Aeneas Silvius, **Latinus Silvius**, and **Romulus Silvius** are shadows of their more famous namesakes. It is reported that Romulus Silvius provoked the anger of Jupiter by imitating his thunder and lightning, and was struck dead by a thunderbolt,⁵⁰ but this was simply a reworking of the Greek myth of Salmoneus (see p. 396). His house was supposed to have been submerged below the Alban Lake, where its remains could be seen in historical times. The names of Atys and Capys were also recycled from the earlier tradition. **Atys** shares his name (which is related to that of the Phrygian god Attis) with several members of the early Lydian royal family mentioned by Herodotus,⁵¹ while the name of **Capys** is based on that of Aeneas' grandfather, Capys, son of Assaracos. It would be natural to think of Capua in connection with the latter name in the Italian context, and the *Aeneid* states accordingly that it was founded by another Capys who had accompanied Aeneas from Troy.⁵² It is harder to say why Capys' successor should have been called **Capetus**, since the only Capetos recorded in Greek myth is a thoroughly obscure figure who appears in a list of the suitors of Hippodameia.⁵³ **Agrippa** would have been classed as an Alban king long before the time of Augustus' famous minister of that name, and his name was presumably suggested by that of a legendary figure from the earlier history of Rome, Menenius Agrippa, who was supposed to have played a prominent part in the events that led to the appointment of the first tribune of the plebeians.⁵⁴ **Alba** was obviously named after the city while **Tiberinus** was invented to serve as the eponym of the Tiber. It was explained that the river was originally known as the Albula, but was renamed in honour of Tiberinus after he was drowned while leading an army across it, or was swept away by it after being killed in battle beside it.⁵⁵ **Aventinus** for his part was the eponym of the Aventine hill at Rome. As the father of Numitor and his quarrelsome brother, **Proca**, whose name simply means chieftain or prince (cf. Latin *procer* or *procus*) would surely already have appeared in the Roman foundation-myth before this Alban dynasty came to be invented.

The birth, exposure, and earlier life of Romulus and Remus

PROCA, who reigned at Alba Longa some twelve generations after the city was founded by Ascanius, had two sons who were of very different nature, the noble-

mind NUMITOR and the vicious AMULIUS. Although Numitor should have succeeded to the throne as the elder brother, Amulius drove him out and then murdered his sons to reinforce his own position.⁵⁶ He seized Numitor's daughter RHEA SILVIA furthermore, also known as ILIA, and forced her to become a Vestal Virgin, ostensibly as an honour but in reality to prevent her from marrying and bearing children who might present a danger to him. His precautions proved ineffective, however, in the face of divine intervention. It was a duty of the priestesses of Vesta, at Alba as at Rome, to fetch pure spring-water for use in the cult of the goddess; and while the daughter of Numitor was visiting the grove of Mars (the god of war) for this purpose one day, the god caught her by surprise and raped her, causing her to conceive twin sons, ROMULUS and REMUS.⁵⁷ Her uncle responded to this unwelcome development with his customary ruthlessness, ordering that she should be imprisoned or killed after the birth of her children,⁵⁸ and that the new-born infants should be hurled into the Tiber. His plans were destined to be foiled once again, however, because the river happened to be in flood at the time. In one version of the story, the king's servants set the children afloat in a basket or other small vessel, but the over-brimming waters cast them safely ashore under the Palatine hill at the site of Rome.⁵⁹ Or, fearing to approach the raging waters, the men left the basket on the ground near the river-bank, and it was subsequently washed away by the rising waters and carried gently downstream to the site of Rome.⁶⁰ Or, the men simply deposited the children at the edge of the flood-waters at the site of Rome itself.⁶¹

By whatever course of events, the twins ended up at a point on the river-bank that was marked by an ancient tree, the Ruminallis fig tree (*figus Ruminallis*). A she-wolf heard them crying there as it came down to the water to drink, and suckled them until they were found and rescued by their own kind. Wolves were especially associated with their divine father Mars, and some authors underlined that connection by adding that a woodpecker, the bird of Mars, tended them by bringing them food in its beak.⁶²

The fig tree could still be seen in the age of Augustus, although it was apparently in a poor state by then. It was associated with a minor goddess called Rumina, who presided over the suckling of children. That a tree of that kind should have been her special tree is understandable in view of its milky sap, and it was presumably introduced into the story of the abandoned infants because of its connection with suckling. Since its name bears some resemblance to that of Romulus, however, some authors came to claim that it had been named after him, having originally been known as the Romularis fig tree. As for the story of the she-wolf, it accords with a common motif in Greek myth in which exposed infants are suckled by animals until they are rescued (see e.g. pp. 396 and 550–1); but there is no record of any early Greek legend in which a she-wolf is presented as performing that service. At the most there is a tale ascribed to Nicander (second century BC) in which Miletos is said to have been tended by wolves at the will of his father Apollo after being exposed by his mother on Crete.⁶³ Since the legend of Miletos follows other patterns in earlier sources (see p. 300), it seems likely that the version involving wolves was invented by Nicander himself, perhaps with the Roman legend in mind. The only other Greek

story of this kind, in the pseudo-Plutarchean *Greek and Roman Parallel Stories*, may be put aside as an apocryphal myth that was plainly based on the Roman story.⁶⁴ The fact that the fig tree was located near the grotto of the Lupercal, which had a name suggestive of wolves (*lupi*), may have influenced the development of this part of the legend.

The twins were eventually discovered by FAUSTULUS, the chief herdsman of Amulius, who took them home and entrusted them to the care of his wife ACCA LARENTIA. Or else some local shepherds stumbled across them and passed them on to Faustulus.⁶⁵ The name of the charitable Faustulus is derived from the Latin word *faustus*, meaning lucky or auspicious; he was a bringer of good fortune. The twins were reared by him and his wife in rural isolation, and supported themselves by their own labours when they grew up, working with the local herdsmen and building huts for themselves as shelter. A thatched hut that was supposedly of their construction, the *casa Romuli* or 'hut of Romulus', could be seen on the Palatine hill in historical times near the steps of Cacus; and there was another hut of the kind on the Capitoline hill.⁶⁶ As befitted youths of royal descent, the twins showed themselves to be more enterprising than their fellow herdsmen, and became their acknowledged leaders; it was said that they helped them to fight back against cattle-rustlers, or acted rather in the manner of Robin Hood, plundering from the local brigands and sharing the proceeds with their rustic friends. One may suspect that they would have engaged in cattle-rustling on their own account in the earliest tradition.⁶⁷

The twins finally discovered their true identity after Remus happened to be delivered into the hands of their exiled grandfather Numitor. They and their friends lived on the Palatine hill, while the herdsmen of Numitor pastured their cattle on the neighbouring Aventine; and the two different groups were constantly quarrelling over grazing-rights and other matters. One day, after the feud had turned violent, the herdsmen of Numitor captured Remus in an ambush while his brother and friends were attending a sacrifice (or taking part in the disorderly festival of the Lupercalia), and hauled him in front of their master on a charge of cattle-theft. Or else they took him to Amulius, who handed him over to his brother for judgement. On hearing of Remus' plight, Faustulus told Romulus all that he knew or had guessed about the origin of the two brothers and their royal birth; and fortified by this knowledge, Romulus hurried off to Numitor to intercede on his brother's behalf. Numitor had already inferred from Remus' noble appearance and conduct that he might be something more than an ordinary herdsman, and had therefore been making enquiries of his own. So when Romulus arrived, Numitor ordered the release of Remus (if he had not already done so) and acknowledged the young men as his grandsons. The three of them then conspired together to avenge the wrongs that had been inflicted on them by Amulius. With the help of their rustic friends, who stole into Alba by separate routes beforehand, Romulus and Remus caught Amulius by surprise in the palace and killed him; and Numitor then summoned a meeting of the citizens to reveal the crimes of the usurper and reclaim his rightful throne. Different accounts of the story vary considerably in their details; Livy offers a version, for instance, in which Remus was delivered to Numitor under false charges by some

local brigands who had been robbed by him and his brother; and the recognition scene in which Numitor becomes acquainted with his grandchildren was sometimes greatly elaborated under the influence of comparable scenes from Greek tragedy. But the general pattern is always much the same.⁶⁸

The twins set off to found Rome; the contest of the auguries, and the death of Remus

Instead of remaining in Alba under their grandfather's rule, Romulus and Remus decided to found a city of their own by the Tiber in the area where they had been washed ashore and had passed their happy earlier years. Numitor approved of their plan (or even suggested it in one account) and assigned followers and land to them for their new colony.⁶⁹ The twins soon quarrelled, however, either about the site of the city since Romulus wanted to establish it on the Palatine while Remus favoured the Aventine, or else about the throne since each of them wanted to become its ruler and give his name to it, as Rome or Remora. They agreed to refer their dispute to the arbitration of the gods by seeking an omen from bird-flights, a favourite form of divination in ancient Italy. So Romulus took the Palatine hill as his viewing-station while Remus went off to the Aventine a short way to the south. Although it was commonly agreed that Romulus claimed victory after observing a flight of twelve vultures (one of the most important augural birds), the course of the story varies in its different versions. In the earliest surviving account from some lines of verse quoted from Ennius, Remus apparently saw no birds at all (even if the passage breaks off too early for this to be entirely certain).⁷⁰ In other accounts, Remus saw six vultures before Romulus saw his twelve, and the significance of the omens was thus more disputable since they could be interpreted as favouring Romulus on grounds of number or Remus on grounds of priority. According to Livy, a fight broke out between the supporters of each brother and Remus was killed in the fray.⁷¹ It was more generally believed, however, that Romulus was adjudged the victor and Remus met his death slightly later in other circumstances.

To mark out the bounds (*pomerium*) of the new city, Romulus yoked a bull and cow together and ploughed a furrow around the base of the Palatine hill; and after sacrificing the plough-cattle and other victims, he set his followers to work to raise a defensive wall along the line of the furrow and to build the city itself. While the wall was in the course of construction, Remus, who was still aggrieved at having been defeated in the contest over the auguries, mocked his brother by jumping over the half-completed ramparts and so committing a deliberately inauspicious act. Or else he did so with a more positive intent, to show the inadequacy of the fortifications. Romulus was furious in any case and killed him in a fit of anger, cursing anyone who should dare to cross over the walls in the future to suffer a comparable fate.⁷²

There are two surviving myths from the Greek tradition that bear some resemblance to this Roman story. An obscure Boeotian ruler called Poimandros, who was the eponymous founder of Poimandria (near Tanagra or perhaps to be identified with it), was said to have killed his son Ephippos for jumping over a defensive ditch

that he had set around his city.⁷³ Or, in a somewhat different version, he killed his son (here named as Leucippus) with a stone by accident when aiming at a builder who had disparaged the ditch and jumped over it.⁷⁴ In the other story of the kind, of which the barest outline is preserved, Oineus was said to have killed his son Toxeus for 'jumping over the ditch' at his city of Calydon (see p. 383).⁷⁵ These legends – or the first at least since so little is known of the second – seem to carry the same moral as that of Remus, namely that anyone who violates the defensive circle commits an ill-omened act that deserves drastic punishment, irrespective of ties of kinship. Anyone who crossed over the Roman walls in historical times was in fact liable to a death penalty. It should also be remembered in this connection that the Romans and Etruscans (unlike the Greeks) regarded city-walls as sacred. There is no reason to suppose that the legend of the death of Remus was modelled on stories from Greece; it was known to Ennius and was probably a central feature of the foundation-legend from early times. Romulus' act of fratricide, justified though it may have been from a certain point of view, evidently came to be felt as something of an embarrassment, since many accounts stress that he felt grave remorse afterwards or even absolved him from the murder altogether. In Ovid's version in the *Fasti*, for instance, a certain Celer who took the lead during the building work was charged by Romulus to kill anyone who dared to jump over the walls; and when Remus, who had not heard of his brother's order, cast scorn on the walls and jumped over them to prove their inadequacy, Celer struck him dead with a shovel.⁷⁶

How Romulus acquired people for his new city; his conflict with the Sabines, and death and apotheosis

Being now the sole and undisputed sovereign of the little community, Romulus set out to procure more citizens by opening a sanctuary or *asylum* (from Greek *asylon* – the name and institution alike are Greek, with no close equivalent in Italy) on the Capitoline hill, in the dip between its two summits; and landless men and outcasts, and runaway slaves and criminals, duly flocked to it from the lands all around.⁷⁷ The future of the city was not yet assured, however, since women were also required but the neighbouring peoples rejected all proposals of intermarriage, partly because they feared that Rome might grow too powerful, and partly because of the dubious origins of many of its citizens. So Romulus resorted to trickery. He invited men from the surrounding territories, particularly the Sabines, to attend the Roman festival of the Consualia with their wives and children, announcing that there would be splendid sacrifices and public games and shows; and in response to a prearranged signal, the young men of Rome rushed into the crowd during the festivities and carried off all the unmarried girls. The episode has come to be known as the rape (i.e. abduction) of the Sabine women. After the other visitors had fled, Romulus tried to reassure the captives, promising them that they would be treated with proper respect if they were married to Roman citizens; and they eventually became reconciled to their lot. Some authors agree with Livy in stating that thirty girls were seized, while others suggest that there were many more, over 500.⁷⁸

Even if the abducted maidens came to accept their fate, their relations were less philosophical and roused their cities to war. Although the smaller states were easily defeated, the Sabines, under their king TITUS TATIUS, presented more of a threat. They marched against Rome and seized the Capitol as a result of the treachery of TARPEIA, the daughter of the citadel's commander, who opened the gates to them in secret because she coveted their gold armbands. In return for her help, they had promised to give her 'what they were wearing on their left arms'; but they fulfilled their promise in a wholly different manner from what she had been expecting, by crushing her to death under their shields (for they also carried those on their left arms).⁷⁹ As in similar Greek stories of filial treachery (see pp. 236 and 291), the Sabines were so shocked by Tarpeia's behaviour (even though they had benefited from it) that they preferred to kill her rather than to reward her for it. After this initial success, the Sabines were able to use the Capitol as a base to attack the main Roman force on the Palatine. The opposing armies clashed on low ground between the two hills, on the site of the Forum, then a marshy and undrained strip of land. A hard-fought battle ensued in which the Romans finally began to win the upper hand; but as the two armies were preparing for the final confrontation, the abducted women, many of them mothers by this time and carrying their infants in their arms, rushed in between the Romans and Sabines and appealed to them to make peace, protesting that they would rather die than lose their husbands on the one hand or their fathers on the other. This appeal had the desired effect, and the two leaders stepped forward to make terms. They not only agreed to a truce but also resolved that their two peoples should be united into a single nation under their joint rule. Romulus remained on the Palatine with the original settlers while Titus Tatius and his Sabines settled on the Capitol and Quirinal.⁸⁰ This completes the cycle of legend that began with Romulus' establishment of the asylum; as a consequence of the war, Rome acquired further citizens, and the arrival of the Sabines serves to account for a strong Sabine element in the population.

The ensuing period of dual kingship, in which Titus Tatius was supposed to have ruled alongside Romulus, could serve as a precedent for the dual consulship of the republican era. This shadowy colleague of the founder, who never found his way into the canonic list of Roman kings, was probably a figure of relatively late invention. He was supposed to have given his name to one of the three early Roman tribes, the Titii or Titienses, and to have founded a minor priestly college at Rome, the Sodales Titii, whose original function is unknown (before it was refounded in connection with the cult of the Emperor). In the sixth year of this dual kingship, Titus Tatius provoked his own death through some unjust acts, leaving Romulus to rule on his own once again. For after some friends of his became involved in some depredations committed on the territory of Lavinium, he not only frustrated the attempts of the Lavinians to gain satisfaction through the law, but also intervened to help the guilty men after the Lavinian ambassadors were murdered. So when he subsequently visited Lavinium to perform an annual sacrifice (see p. 532), the friends and relations of the ambassadors killed him at the altar with knives and spits used in the sacrifice.⁸¹

Putting aside a mass of other material, pseudo-historical and aetiological, we may

conclude with the story of Romulus' death. As he was reviewing his troops one day on the Campus Martius (Field of Mars) just outside the city, a violent thunderstorm broke out and he was enveloped in a cloud so thick that he was completely hidden from view; and when the storm cleared, he was nowhere to be seen, and no trace of him could ever be found. As the Romans were arguing about the meaning of this mysterious event, a certain Julius Proculus, a farmer of Alba Longa, came to the Forum to report that the glorified Romulus had appeared to him and had told him that he had become the god Quirinus, and that Rome was destined to become the capital of the world.⁸² After having once been one of the highest gods at Rome, as is indicated by the fact that his *flamen* (special priest) ranked with those of Iuppiter and Mars as one of the *flamines maiores*, Quirinus seems to have suffered something of an eclipse; Romulus was presumably identified with him because he was a god with martial associations who was thought to bear some resemblance to Mars (whatever his original nature). If the historians were happy to allow the exact nature of Romulus' departure to remain a mystery, a poet such as Ovid could describe how his father Mars had descended from heaven in his blood-stained chariot to sweep him away to his new home among the gods.⁸³ Since this story of the founder's apotheosis was clearly Greek-inspired, and there is no evidence of an early cult of Romulus at Rome, it is doubtless a relatively late feature of the foundation-legend, originating in the second or third century BC.

Rationalistic accounts also inevitably came to be developed in which Romulus is said to have been secretly assassinated. In one such version, it was explained that the patricians conspired against him because they considered that he was no longer ruling like a king, but was exercising his power in an arbitrary and tyrannical fashion. So they joined together to murder him in the Senate-house, and then cut his body into small pieces, which they carried away under their clothing and buried in secret.⁸⁴ Or else some newly enrolled citizens who had a grievance against Romulus took advantage of the above-mentioned storm on the Campus Martius to do away with him while he was hidden from view.⁸⁵

An important question that remains to be considered is that of the origin of the legend of Romulus and Remus. Can it be supposed that it was a genuine product of the Roman imagination, perhaps even originating in folklore independently of Greek influence? The tale of exposure and wondrous deliverance of the twins certainly follows a pattern that is very familiar in Greek myth, in which a hero is conceived to a god by a girl who is isolated in some way from ordinary family life, and is exposed at birth but comes to be saved by the attentions of an animal, which suckles the child until he is discovered by a shepherd or herdsman; and his rescuer then rears him in rural isolation until he emerges to fulfil some exceptional destiny. Twins figure, moreover, in some Greek myths of this kind, such as that of Pelias and Neleus (see p. 396). If the story of the exposure of Romulus and Remus was not of native origin, it would surely have been easy enough for some Greek or Roman author to invent it by taking famous Greek legends of the kind as a model; and precisely because the parallels are so striking, and for various other reasons too, most classical scholars were once inclined to believe that it was a literary fabrication of relatively late origin. Tales of the exposure and rescue of royal children are by no means

confined to Greek myth however, but accord with a widespread pattern, which is attested in the traditions of other Indo-European peoples and far beyond. So there is nothing inherently implausible in the notion that the Romulus legend may have been developed at Rome independently of Greek influence, perhaps even as a folk-tale. Partly as the result of the admission of a wider range of comparative evidence, but above all as the result of a reassessment of relevant aspects of the Greek and Roman tradition, there has been a marked shift in the consensus in recent decades, and most authorities are now inclined to accept that the legend of Romulus and Remus was a fairly ancient story of indigenous origin.

Although there is no positive evidence to show exactly when the legend of the exposure of Romulus and Remus was first developed, we can at least be sure that it was familiar at Rome by the end of the fourth century BC. Livy reports that two Roman magistrates (curule aediles), Cnaeus Ogulnius and Quintus Ogulnius, raised a statue of the wolf and twins near the Ruminalis fig tree in 296 BC, paying for it with fines that they had collected from usurers;⁸⁶ and some thirty years later, probably in 266 BC, this group of the wolf and twins was shown on the earliest silver coinage minted at Rome. This would suggest that the story was not only well established by this period, but had acquired an accepted status at Rome as the standard foundation-legend. Since the minor historian Callias, who worked at the court of Agathocles of Syracuse (died 289 BC), is the earliest datable Greek author known to have referred to Romulus in connection with the founding of Rome,⁸⁷ the evidence from Greek literature takes us no further back. If it is indeed the case that the legend of Romulus and Remus was of native invention, it is reasonable to assume nonetheless that the basic story was quite old, perhaps dating back to the early sixth century BC.

Notes

¹ Stes. 205.

² Hellanic. 4F84 (= D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.72.1–2).

³ Hellanic. 4F31 (see D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.47.1–6).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See e.g. D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.72.5 (by Aineias), 1.72.6 (by Ascanios), Plut. *Rom.* 2.1.

⁶ Serv. *Aen.* 1.273.

⁷ See e.g. D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.72, Plut. *Rom.* 2.1.

⁸ Plut. *Rom.* 2.1.

⁹ Plut. *Rom.* 1.1.

¹⁰ Sallust *Cat.* 6.1.2.

¹¹ Verg. *Aen.* 3.1–191.

¹² Ibid. 192–267.

¹³ Ibid. 285–505.

¹⁴ Ibid. 506–715.

¹⁵ Ibid. Books. 1 and 4.

¹⁶ Ibid. Book 5.

¹⁷ Serv. *Aen.* 1.550.

¹⁸ Scol. Lyc. 592. For a rationalized version of the myth, see D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.52.

¹⁹ Ibid. Book 6.

²⁰ Ibid. 7.1–36, 107–29.

²¹ Ibid. 7.148ff.; oracle granted to Latinus on marriage of daughter, 7.81–101. The succeeding events take us to the end of the epic.

²² Hes. *Theog.* 1011–16.

- 23 As in Verg. *Aen.* 7.47–9.
- 24 Cato *Origines* fr. 8–12.
- 25 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.57–2.59.
- 26 Verg. *Aen.* 3.388–93, 8.31–85.
- 27 Ibid. 6.703ff.
- 28 Ibid. 6.760–6.
- 29 Ibid. 6.767–87.
- 30 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.67.4 (= Timaeus 566F59).
- 31 Cato *Origines* fr. 4, Livy 1.1.3, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.53.3, Serv. *Aen.* 1.5, 7.158.
- 32 D.S. 7.5.4–5 (citing Fabius Pictor), D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.56.
- 33 Lyc. 1253–60, Pliny *N.H.* 3.69.
- 34 D.S. 7.5.5.
- 35 Verg. *Aen.* 8.42–8.
- 36 D.S. 7.5.6.
- 37 Varro *Res Rust.* 2.4.18.
- 38 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.64.5.
- 39 Livy 1.2.6 (does not commit himself on whether deified), Serv. *Aen.* 1.259 (some say that fell into river, Ovid that carried up to heaven), Ov. *Met.* 14.581–608 (turned into a god), Verg. *Aen.* 1.295–6, 12.794–5 (this foretold); D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.64 (with rationalistic explanation), Fest. 94 L.
- 40 Serv. *Aen.* 2.296, 3.12, 8.664, Val. Max. 1.6.7, Macrobian *Sat.* 3.4.11.
- 41 Hom. *Il.* 2.862–3.
- 42 Hom. *Hymn. Aphrodite* 191–201.
- 43 Verg. *Aen.* 8.47–9, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.66.
- 44 Serv. *Aen.* 6.760.
- 45 Livy 1.3.6.
- 46 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.67, Val. Max. 1.87.
- 47 Cato fr. 13, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.70; and in all catalogues of Alban kings (see p. 595).
- 48 Ascanius childless, Serv. *Aen.* 6.760; Silvius chosen instead of Iulus, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.70.3, D.S. 7.5.8.
- 49 Livy 1.3.6–9.
- 50 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.71.3, D.S. 7.5.11 (here as Aramulius Silvius); cf. Livy 1.3.9, Ov. *Met.* 14.617–18.
- 51 Hdt. 1.7, 1.34 etc.
- 52 Verg. *Aen.* 10.145, this Capys also mentioned 1.183, 9.576.
- 53 Paus. 6.21.10.
- 54 See Livy 2.32.
- 55 D.S. 7.5.10, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.71.2, Serv. *Aen.* 8.72 and 330.
- 56 Livy 1.3.4, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.71.4, Plut. *Rom.* 3, Justin 34.2, Serv. *Aen.* 6.777.
- 57 Livy 1.3.11–4.2, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.77, Plut. *Rom.* 3, Justin 34.2.
- 58 E.g. schol. Hor. *Ode* 1.2.18 (citing Ennius), Serv. *Aen.* 1.273, Justin 34.2, Conon 48.
- 59 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.6–8.
- 60 Plut. *Rom.* 3.
- 61 Livy 1.4.4–5.
- 62 Plut. *Rom.* 3, Serv. *Aen.* 1.273.
- 63 Ant. Lib. 30.
- 64 Ps.Plut. *Parallel Tales* 36.
- 65 Full narrative, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.6–9; cf. Varro *de Re Rust.* 2.1.9, Livy 1.4.6–7, Plut. *Rom.* 6, Florus 1.1.3.
- 66 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.10–11, Plut. *Rom.* 10, Livy 1.4.5.
- 67 Livy 1.4.8–9, Plut. *Rom.* 6.
- 68 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.12–83.2, Plut. *Rom.* 7–10, Livy 1.5.6, Justin 43.2–3.
- 69 E.g. D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.85.1–4, Livy 1.6.
- 70 Ennius *Annals* 80ff.
- 71 Livy 1.7, cf. Serv. *Aen.* 1.273, Florus 1.1. For another version involving an initial deception on the part of Romulus, see Plut. *Rom.* 1.9, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.86.3–4.
- 72 Livy 1.7 (cited as commoner version), Ennius *Annals* 94–6, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.87.4, Plut. *Rom.* 10 (but ditch instead of wall), Florus 1.1.8.
- 73 Suppl. Hell. 715.
- 74 Plut. *Moralia* 299c.
- 75 Apollod. 1.8.1, cf. allusion in Suppl. Hell. 715.

- 76 Ov. *Fast.* 4.835–56.
- 77 Calpurnius Piso fr. 4P. (earliest mention), Livy 1.8.5, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.15, Plut. *Rom.* 9.3.
- 78 Livy 1.9, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.30, Plut. *Rom.* 14, Serv. *Aen.* 8.635; Fabius Pictor 809F5, Ennius *Scen.* 370, *Ann.* 98.
- 79 Livy 1.11.7–8, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.38–40, Val. Max. 9.6.1, Festus 496 L, Propertius 4.4.
- 80 Livy 1.12–13, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.41–6, Plut. *Rom.* 18–20.
- 81 Livy 1.14.1–3, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.51–2, Plut. *Rom.* 23.1–2.
- 82 Livy 1.16, cf. Ov. *Fast.* 2.475–510, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.56.2 with 2.63.3–4, Plut. *Rom.* 27.3 and 28.
- 83 Ov. *Met.* 14.805–28, cf. Ennius *Ann.* 65–6.
- 84 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.56.3–4, cf. Livy 1.16.4.
- 85 D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.26.5.
- 86 Livy 10.32.12.
- 87 As cited in D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.72.5 (= Callias 564F5).

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Legends of Arcadia and final miscellany

Every part of Greece had its local legends, as did the Greek islands too and the Greek colonies overseas. The more important ones have already been considered for the most part, either in connection with the mythical history of the major centres or while we were tracing the tangled histories of the great families of heroic mythology; but there are also many others, some relating to notable figures such as Orpheus and Orion who did not belong to any of the great families, and others that never came to be of more than regional significance, and others again that became more widely known outside their area of origin simply because they were taken up by some famous poet or were particularly appealing in themselves. This final chapter will offer a selection of some of the more interesting of these remaining legends, some of venerable antiquity and others of Hellenistic or later origin. There is also one quite substantial body of myth that has yet to be considered, the mythology of Arcadia, the mountainous central province of the Peloponnese, which was something of a world apart. The Arcadian royal family, which was descended from Pelasgos, the earth-born first man of the land, was rather similar in character to the Athenian royal family prior to Theseus, in so far as few of its members played any major role in heroic saga and it was associated above all with a distinctive body of local legend. We will approach this remaining material on a regional basis, starting in the Peloponnese with the myths of Arcadia and the family of Sisyphos at Corinth, before proceeding northwards to Central Greece and Thrace, and finally venturing overseas to the Aegean islands and remoter parts.

Legends of Arcadia

Pelasgos, the earth-born first king of Arcadia

In much the same way as the Athenians, the Arcadians cherished the partially justified belief that they were an indigenous (or ‘autochthonous’) people who had inhabited their land from the earliest times with little admixture from outside. They liked to claim, indeed, that they were the most ancient inhabitants of Greece, a race of ‘pre-Selenians’ who had lived in their rugged home in the heart of the

Peloponnese even before the moon (*selēnē*) first rose into the sky.¹ Their ancestral hero and first king was PELASGOS, who was born from the earth at the beginning of history, as early as Deucalion or earlier still, and may even have been the first man of all. Although Pausanias is inclined to doubt that he was really the first man in Arcadia (for how could he have had anyone to rule over in that case?), he quotes some lines from the early epic poet Asios that express the idea that he was the ancestor of the human race: 'the black earth brought forth god-like Pelasgos in the mountains with their high-foliaged trees so that a mortal race might come to be'.² He was the eponym of the Pelasgians, the people who were supposed to have been the aboriginal (i.e. pre-Hellenic) inhabitants of Greece; in terms of Arcadian myth, he was said to have given his name to the people of the land, who retained it until his great-grandson Arcas renamed them as Arcadians after himself.³

Like Cecrops at Athens, Pelasgos was more a local Adam than a subject of legend, although he came to be credited with various achievements as a culture-hero in the later tradition. Pausanias records a rather artificial scheme in which he is said to have introduced the first rudiments of civilization into Arcadia, leaving scope for his successors to improve on his innovations and so raise the Arcadians to a fully human way of life. So Pelasgos first invented huts and sheep-skin tunics to protect his people from the elements, leaving it for Lycaon and Arcas to show them how to build towns and weave clothes from wool; and, likewise, he first taught the Arcadians to feed on acorns rather than leaves, grasses, and roots that might turn out to be poisonous, leaving it for Arcas to introduce bread and the cultivation of grain.⁴ Acorns remained a part of the diet of the Arcadians until a relatively late period, hence the title of 'acorn-eaters' that was traditionally applied to them.

Lycaon and his fifty sons

Pelasgos married the mountain nymph Cyllene (or the Oceanid nymph Meliboia, or a certain Deianeira), who bore him a single son, his heir and successor LYCAON.⁵ As might be inferred from his name, Lycaon was especially associated with Mt Lycaion in south-western Arcadia. He was the mythical founder of the ancient cult of Zeus Lycaios, which was celebrated in a dramatic setting on the highest peak of the mountain; in front of the altar, which consisted of a mound of earth and ash, there stood two pillars with gilded eagles on top facing towards the rising sun. Lycaon was also said to have founded Lycosura below, reputedly the oldest town in the world, and the Lycaian Games, which were held in conjunction with the festival of Lycaian Zeus and were reputed to be the oldest of their kind.⁶ The cult of Zeus on the mountain, which was highly respected throughout Greece, was particularly important in Arcadia itself because it provided a focus of unity for the people of the land, who lived in widely scattered communities.

Lycaon fathered fifty sons by many different women, and also a notable daughter, Callisto, who became the mother of the eponym of the land. As can be seen from the catalogue of names preserved by Apollodorus, most of the sons of Lycaon were eponyms of Arcadian towns.⁷ Since all of them (or all apart from one, who was childless) died early at the hand of Zeus, none survived to found families of their

own, and all subsequent members of the Arcadian royal family were thus descended from Callisto through her son Arcas. The fall of the house of Lycaon was provoked by a gruesome act of sacrilege, when the king or his sons attempted to feed human flesh to Zeus. Although Lycaon himself was almost certainly the original transgressor, the crime is more commonly assigned to his sons, apparently because authors of later ages found it hard to believe that the pious founder of the main cult of Zeus in Arcadia could have been guilty of such an act. Apollodorus explains accordingly that the sons of Lycaon exceeded all others in arrogance and impiety, and showed this in full measure when Zeus visited them in the guise of a poor traveller to test whether they were really as bad as their reputation suggested; for they invited him into the palace to enjoy their hospitality, but mixed the guts of a slaughtered child into the meat from the sacrifices, and served this unholy mixture to him as a meal. Appalled by their action, which was carried out at the instigation of the eldest brother Mainalos, Zeus overturned the table and struck them dead with thunderbolts along with their father, sparing only the youngest brother, Nyctimos, because Ge (Earth) interceded on his behalf.⁸ The overturning of the table was a stock motif in stories of this kind, for it symbolized the breaking off of direct contact between gods and mortals; and, in this Arcadian context, it could also be used to explain why the town of Trapezous in the south-west of the province, the supposed site of the incident, had come to be called by that name, *trapeza* being the Greek name for a table.⁹

It is suggested in another version that Zeus visited Lycaon openly as a guest (for the gods would sometimes associate directly with mortals in the very earliest times), and the sons of the king mixed human flesh into the meal that was served to him (killing their youngest brother Nyctimos for the purpose in one account) to test whether their visitor was really a god, for he would be sure to recognize the true nature of the meal if that were the case.¹⁰ Or, in a partially rationalized version, Lycaon tried to encourage his people to behave righteously by telling them that Zeus visited the land regularly in disguise to test their ways; and when he offered up a sacrifice one day, claiming that he was expecting a visit from Zeus, some of his sons killed a child and mixed the child's flesh into the meat from the sacrifice to test whether he was telling the truth, since Zeus would know what they had done if he really did make a visit. A fierce storm then erupted with much lightning, apparently at the will of Zeus, and the murderers of the child were killed without exception.¹¹

Or, in a wholly different account transmitted in the astronomical literature, Lycaon was so angry to learn that Zeus had raped his daughter Callisto (see below, p. 546) that, pretending to be ignorant of the matter, he invited him to make a visit and served him a meal containing the flesh of Callisto's son Arcas; whereupon Zeus overturned the table in the usual way, struck the house with a thunderbolt, and transformed Lycaon into a wolf. As it happens, this is the only version to be credited to a pre-Hellenistic source, since the story is ascribed to 'Hesiod' (evidently having been drawn from the Hesiodic *Catalogue* or *Astronomy*).¹² The dead infant was reassembled afterwards by Zeus, and we will follow his further history below (p. 546). Lycaon was also said to have killed Nyctimos for that purpose. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lycaon is said to have served human flesh, here from a Molossian hostage, to Zeus to test his omniscience, and to have suffered the same fate as a

result.¹³

Pausanias was told in Arcadia that Lycaon was turned into a wolf (*lykos*) because he sacrificed a human child on the altar of Zeus Lycaios; and the Arcadians linked this story to a strange werewolf superstition that came to be associated with the cult of Zeus Lycaios.¹⁴ For ever since the time of Lycaon, so it was said, one of the men who participated in the annual sacrifice on Mt Lycaion would turn into a wolf after tasting the sacrificial meat, which was reputed to contain human flesh. The wolf-men who were thus created were not obliged to remain in that form forever, for they would return to their original form after nine years if they abstained from human flesh in the meantime. If they tasted it even once, on the other hand, there could be no possible escape for them.¹⁵ It is tempting to suppose that the local legend about Lycaon's child-sacrifice represents the original story from which all subsequent variants took their start; but Pausanias collected the story at such a late period (the second century AD) that it is hard to know whether it was genuinely ancient or a product of antiquarian invention.

In Apollodorus' account of these events, as we saw above, Lycaon's youngest son NYCTIMOS was spared, and he thus survived to become the next ruler, as is also stated in Pausanias' pseudo-historical account of the earliest developments in Arcadia.¹⁶ In many accounts, however, in which all of Lycaon's sons are killed, the throne is said to have passed to his grandson Arcas. But since no other stories are recorded for Nyctimos, and it was generally agreed moreover that he had no children, it makes little difference whether Arcas came to the throne directly after the death of his grandfather, or after his uncle had occupied the throne before him.

Callisto and Arcas

CALLISTO, the daughter of Lycaon, left home to roam the mountains of Arcadia as a virgin hunting companion of Artemis; but she attracted the roving eye of Zeus, who raped or seduced her, causing her to become pregnant with a male child, Arcas. Although this proved disastrous to Callisto herself, who was transformed into a bear as a consequence, it at least ensured that Lycaon had an heir to succeed him after losing his sons. Arcas ascended to the throne either immediately after the death of his grandfather, or after the intervening reign of Nyctimos in the accounts in which that son of Lycaon escaped the fate of his brothers.

Although it was generally agreed that Callisto was raped or seduced by Zeus while she was a companion of Artemis, and that she was transformed into a bear (*arktos*) thereafter and gave birth to her son Arcas while in that form, the story was recounted in all manner of different versions. All of them can be assigned, however, to one of two main categories.

- (i) In the simpler version of the story, Zeus transformed Callisto into a bear after raping her to try to conceal the matter from his jealous wife, who had gained an idea of what was happening when she had seen him pursuing Callisto into a wood, and wanted to catch him in the act. Hera was by no means deceived, however, when she found a bear in place of the girl whom she had expected, and she incited Artemis to kill the bear by calling it to her attention while she was out hunting. After the transformed Callisto was killed in this way, Zeus

recovered her child, presumably by snatching him from her womb (as Apollo did with Asclepius, see p. 143), and then entrusted it to Maia, an Arcadian mistress of his (see p. 172), to be reared in her cave on Mt Cyllene.¹⁷ Or else Hera herself turned Callisto into a bear by way of punishment after catching her with Zeus, and Artemis then shot her while she was in bear-form, either knowingly as a favour to Hera or unknowingly when she happened to run across the beast during a hunting trip. Zeus ensured the rescue of her child as usual, sending Hermes to recover it from her body according to one account.¹⁸

- (ii) In the more elaborate versions of her legend, Callisto gave birth to her son in the wilds after the full term of her pregnancy, and survived for long enough in bear-form to be hunted by Arcas when he grew up. As an easily accessible example of such a version, we may first turn to Ovid's narrative in the *Metamorphoses*. When Zeus once happened to catch sight of Callisto lying on her own in the grass, he assumed the form of Artemis to approach her and then proceeded to rape her in spite of her determined resistance. On a sultry day nine months afterwards, Artemis invited her attendants to bathe with her after the hunt and noticed that Callisto was pregnant when she was obliged to undress. So the goddess expelled her from her company, and Callisto gave birth to her child shortly afterwards. Now Hera had known all along that she had attracted the desire of Zeus, and the birth of the child added a further sting to her resentment, provoking her to take action against the girl at last by transforming her into a bear. Callisto roamed the countryside in that form for fifteen years until her son ran across her one day while he was out hunting. Having no reason to suspect that she was his mother, he would have transfixed her with his hunting-spear if Zeus had not saved him from matricide by removing him and his mother to the heavens, to become the neighbouring constellations of the Great Bear and Bootes (the Herdsman, also known in Greek as Arctophylax or the Bear-guard).¹⁹

As was mentioned above in connection with the stories in which Lycaon or his sons served the flesh of a dead child to Zeus, there was a version in which Lycaon killed Arcas during his infancy for that purpose. In that case, Zeus reassembled the child afterwards, brought him back to life again, and entrusted him to a herdsman to be reared in the countryside. Although there would presumably have been versions that concluded in much the same way as Ovid's, with her simply being hunted by her son when he grew up, the surviving accounts are more complicated and apparently rather garbled. We are told in one such account that the transformed Callisto was captured in the mountains by some goatherds, who handed her over to Lycaon along with her child. Some time later, she happened to wander into the precinct of Lycaian Zeus, which was forbidden ground to any mortal under pain of death; and her son chased after her along with some other Arcadians and would have killed her if Zeus, calling to mind their former relationship, had not snatched them away and transferred them to the stars. Or, in a slightly different account, Zeus snatched them away when both of them came under threat from the Arcadians.²⁰ Certain features of this narrative seem distinctly odd. There would assuredly have been no law to forbid animals from straying on to the sacred precinct, and Pausanias indicates accordingly that if a hunted beast took refuge there, the hunter would stay outside;²¹ and although herdsman regularly came to the rescue of abandoned infants in myth, the capture of bears would seem to lie outside their normal sphere of action. One may suppose that they would have taken Lycaon alone to the king in the original story, and that he later ran across his bear-mother by accident while out hunting; and when he chased the bear on to the precinct, the local people would have

pursued Lycaon with the intention of killing him as the law demanded, also taking the opportunity to hunt down the bear at the same time.

Such, then, are the more elaborate versions of Callisto's story that belong to the second category. It may also be worth mentioning that Amphis, a Hellenistic comic poet, developed a humorous version in which Zeus assumed the form of Artemis to approach and seduce Callisto. He deceived her so thoroughly that when Artemis subsequently questioned Callisto about her pregnancy, she naively protested that the goddess herself was to blame. Artemis was thoroughly annoyed by her reply, as is understandable, and transformed her into a bear. Ovid borrowed the idea of this seduction ruse, as we have seen, but in his narrative, Callisto recognizes the nature of Zeus's deception at the last moment, as might be expected, and resists him as best she can.²²

Callisto would almost certainly have had no connection with Lycaon in the earliest tradition. It seems probable that she originated as a hypostasis of Artemis (who had a cult in Arcadia as Artemis Calliste, 'the most beautiful'), and then came to be regarded as one of the companion-nymphs of the goddess. Hesiod is reported to have classed her as a nymph accordingly, presumably in the *Catalogue* (as against the *Astronomy*, in which she was evidently a daughter of Lycaon, as is assumed in the preceding stories).²³ According to Apollodorus, the early Corinthian epic poet Eumelos already called her a daughter of Lycaon, while the epic poet Asios described her as a daughter of Nycteus, and Pherecydes as a daughter of an obscure Arcadian called Ceteus (probably to be regarded as a son of Lycaon in this connection).²⁴ By classing her as a daughter of Lycaon, mythographers could construct a unified family tree for the Arcadian royal family in which every line could be traced back to Lycaon and Pelasgos (see Table 20; the details of the scheme can vary); but it is obvious enough that the genealogies for Arcas' branch of the family were of separate origin from those associated with Lycaon, for the former relate to eastern Arcadia alone while the sons of Lycaon served as eponyms for towns in every part of the land.

After ascending to the throne, ARCAS gave his name to the land and also to his people, who had been known as Pelasgians up until that time. In Pausanias' account of the earliest history of Arcadia, he is said to have improved on the innovations of Pelasgos by showing his people how to weave cloth from wool and make bread from grain, and so saving them from having to dress in sheep-skins and feed on acorns as previously; he was able to instruct them in these matters because an obscure hero called Adristos had taught him the art of spinning and Triptolemos (an Eleusinian associate of Demeter, see p. 112) had instructed him in the cultivation of grain while spreading Demeter's gift of corn.²⁵

Arcas entered into a union with a local nymph called Erato or Chrysopeleia (see p. 126 for the circumstances), or else married an ordinary human wife, Leaneira, daughter of Amyklas, or Meganeira, daughter of Crocon, and fathered two sons, **Apheidas** and **Elatos**, and in some accounts a further son of lesser importance called **Azan**.²⁶

Apheidas and his descendants at Tegea, including Auge and Ancaios

The kingdom was divided between the sons of Arcas after their father's death, Apheidas receiving the district of Tegea in the south-east, and Elatos the lands around Mt Cyllene in the north-east. Both founded extensive lines. If Azan is included among the brothers, he inherited the district of Azania in the north of the province.²⁷ As might already be inferred from the nature of this partition, the Arcasid genealogies and the associated family history do not cover the whole of Arcadia, but only the eastern regions of the province. It has been suggested accordingly that this genealogical system was not of native origin, but was devised in Argos, and thus presents a limited picture of Arcadia as viewed from its eastern neighbour. Although a scheme of inheritance was eventually devised in which descendants of Arcas from both main branches of the family were presented as ruling the whole of Arcadia (or the greater part of it) in ordered succession, the resulting pseudo-history is too artificial to be worth tracing here; Pausanias may be consulted on the matter. We will simply pick out some of the more interesting heroes in the present section, before passing on to consider the myths of the Tegean princess Auge, whose life was disrupted as the result of an encounter with Heracles, and the remarkable Amazonian heroine Atalanta (who also had Boeotian connections).

APHEIDAS' Tegean portion of the land was the most prominent in myth, as is by no means surprising, since Tegea was not only the most important city in the province (until the foundation of Megalopolis in the fourth century BC), but was also more exposed to the outside world than any other, lying as it did in the south-eastern plain rather than in the mountains, and on the main route between Argos and Sparta. Apheidas, who has no myths of his own, had a single son, ALEOS (the eponym of the Arcadian town of Alea), who also has no myths, except in so far as he was involved in the story of his daughter Auge (see below, p. 550). He in turn had two sons, Lycourgos and Cepheus, who were both said to have ruled at Tegea at some stage.²⁸

LYCOURGOS is mentioned in the *Iliad* for his feat in killing Areithoos the Mace-man (Corynetes, a title shared by an opponent of Theseus, see p. 293), a formidable warrior who used to smash his way through the enemy ranks with an iron mace. Relying on guile rather than brute force, Lycourgos caught him on a narrow path where he had no room to swing his mace, and felled him with a spear-thrust to the midriff.²⁹ His son ANCAIOS was a brawny hero who used to wear a bear-skin and wielded a double-headed axe. He was best remembered for having met a glorious death during the hunt for the Calydonian boar (see p. 385), which gored him in the thigh as the hunters were coming close for the kill, inflicting a fatal wound on him.³⁰ There is good reason to suppose that this tale goes back to early epic; in a scene from the hunt on the François Krater (c. 570 BC), Ancaios can be seen lying beneath the boar as Meleager and Peleus confront it with their spears. He was supposed to have shown such valour in continuing to confront the beast in spite of his grievous wound that the Arcadians honoured him as one of their greatest heroes. When the temple of Athena Alea was rebuilt in the fourth century BC, the architect and sculptor Scopas portrayed the episode in a sculpture on the pediment, which showed the wounded Ancaios being held up by his brother Epochos as his axe dropped from his grasp.³¹

Ancaios was also supposed to have sailed with the Argonauts, and Apollonius

makes quite frequent reference to him in his Hellenistic account of the expedition, explaining the origin of his uncouth weapon and garb (which may be compared to the club and lion-skin of Heracles) through the following story. When the two younger brothers of Lycourgos set off to join the Argonauts, Lycourgos himself had to stay behind to look after his aged father Aleos, and sent his son Ancaios instead; and since Aleos then tried to keep Ancaios at home too by hiding his arms and armour in the recesses of the palace, he had to make use of the axe and bear-skin as the best available substitutes.³² Because he was so immensely strong, Ancaios was assigned to the same rowing-bench as Heracles; and when a pair of oxen were due to be sacrificed to Apollo before the start of the voyage, Ancaios felled one of them with a single blow of his axe while Heracles felled the other with a blow of his club.³³ Ancaios is otherwise mentioned for the part that he played in the battle between the Argonauts and Bebrycians (see p. 402), in which he deployed his axe to good effect. His son AGAPENOR was king of Tegea at the time of the Trojan War. The *Iliad* reports that he led the men of Arcadia to Troy in sixty ships, which were provided for them by Agamemnon because they had nothing to do with seafaring (as was natural for inhabitants of a landlocked territory).³⁴

Lycourgos' brother CEPHEUS also came to rule at Tegea, but he was killed along with all or most of his twenty sons while assisting Heracles in his war against Hippocoon, king of Sparta; for the story of this expedition and of the lock of the Gorgon's hair that protected Tegea at the time, see p. 264. Another noteworthy hero in this branch of the family was ECHAMOS, son of Aeropos, a grandson or great-grandson of Cepheus who killed Hyllos, son of Heracles, in single combat at the Isthmus of Corinth, and so prevented the Heraclids from invading the Peloponnese at their first attempt, see further on pp. 278–9.

The other main branch of the family of Arcas, which was descended from his son ELATOS, inherited lands in the craggy north-eastern corner of the province around Mt Cyllene. The tomb of his son AIPYTOS under that mountain is mentioned in the *Iliad* as an Arcadian landmark.³⁵ Pausanias was especially interested to see the site because of its Homeric associations, but was clearly disappointed by what he found, a mound of no great size surrounded by a stone platform. He explains that Aipyros died from a snakebite while hunting on Mt Sepia (Viper, apparently a shoulder of Cyllene), and was buried there by his hunting companions because they found it impracticable to carry his body home.³⁶ Pindar refers to him in connection with the birth of IAMOS, the mythical ancestor of the Iamidai, a family of seers at Olympia. After bearing a daughter Euadne to Poseidon, the Laconian nymph Pitane (the eponym of a hamlet of the same name near Sparta) entrusted her to Aipyros to be reared; and when Euadne grew up, she was seduced in her turn by Apollo and conceived a son to him. Although she tried to conceal her pregnancy, her guardian did not fail to observe it, and he hurried off to Delphi to seek the advice of the oracle. Euadne gave birth to her child while Aipyros was away and exposed him in the countryside, though with a heavy heart; but two snakes saved his life at the will of the gods by feeding him on honey. Aipyros had discovered from the oracle in the meantime that the child was a son of Apollo, and that he was destined to be a great seer who would found an unfailing line of prophets. So his mother was able to

recover him, and she named him Iamos because he had been lying in a bed of wild pansies (*ia*).³⁷

STYMPHALOS, another son of Elatos, was the eponymous founder of the city of Stymphalos below Mt Cyllene,³⁸ set near the Stymphalian Lake, which was famous in myth as the site of one of the labours of Heracles (see p. 247). Pelops set out to conquer Arcadia during his reign, but found that he was unable to defeat him; so he pretended to make friends with him and then treacherously murdered him and scattered his remains. The whole of Greece was afflicted by a terrible famine as a result of this crime until the pious Aiacos interceded with the gods through his prayers (see p. 426).³⁹ In some accounts at least, Stymphalos was the father of the mythical builder Agamedes (see p. 558). Two of his more distant descendants are worthy of mention. AIPYTOS, son of Hippothoon, who ruled in Arcadia after the Trojan War,⁴⁰ met a remarkable death as the result of an act of impiety. This occurred at Mantinea in eastern Arcadia where the great builders Trophonios and Agamedes (see pp. 558–9) had raised a wooden temple to Poseidon, and had spread a woollen thread across its entrance to indicate that no mortal was allowed to set foot in it. Aipytos ignored the prohibition, however, and cut the thread to enter the temple; waves broke over his eyes to strike him blind as he was doing so, and he dropped dead within a short time.⁴¹

CYPSELOS, the son and successor of Aipytos, was ruling in Arcadia when the Heraclids and Dorians seized control of the main kingdoms of the Peloponnese (see p. 280). On discovering that one of the Heraclid leaders, Cresphontes, was still unmarried, Cypselos offered his daughter Merope to him as a wife, rightly calculating that he could secure the independence of his kingdom through the resulting marriage alliance.⁴² Cresphontes became king of Messenia and fathered several children by Merope, naming the youngest Aipytos after his wife's grandfather; and when he was subsequently murdered by a usurper, Cypselos harboured Aipytos in Arcadia until he was old enough to avenge the murder and recover his rightful throne (see further on p. 282)

AZAN, the eponym of the district of Azania in northern Arcadia, was sometimes named as a third son of Arcas; his only son Cleitor, who left no heir, was the eponymous founder of Cleitor, the main city of Azania.⁴³ For the story of how Heracles killed a Centaur who tried to rape Azan's bride, see p. 248. The games that were celebrated after his death were said to have been the first funeral-games ever to be held; for a significant incident that occurred during them, see p. 381.

Auge and her son Telephos

Aleos, the above-mentioned king of Tegea, founded the Tegean cult of Athene Alea⁴⁴ and appointed his daughter AUGE to serve as the virgin priestess of the goddess. Heracles raped or seduced her, however, while he was passing through Tegea after his campaign against Hippocoon, king of Sparta (see p. 264), and so caused her to become pregnant with a son, TELEPHOS, who would ultimately become the king of Mysia in the north-western corner of Asia Minor. In what may be the earliest version of the standard account in which Telephos was conceived in Arcadia, the land of his

mother's birth, Aleos packed Auge into a chest along with her infant son after discovering that she had given birth to him, here as a result of a brief love affair with Heracles, and threw the chest into the sea; but it was washed ashore in Asia Minor, where it was discovered by the local ruler, Teuthras, king of Mysia, who rescued the mother and son and took Auge as his wife.⁴⁵ This version follows the same pattern as in the famous myth of Danae and Perseus (see p. 225). Or else Auge or her son, or both together, were conveyed to Asia by the seafarer Nauplios, who was often engaged to dispose of inconvenient children or erring daughters, but was not always sufficiently ruthless to carry out his instructions to the letter.

There are two full narratives in which Nauplios is drawn into the story. To start with that of Apollodorus, Auge tried to conceal her child in the Tegean precinct of Athene Alea after giving birth to him, but the land was struck by a famine and plague as a result of the sacrilege, and when oracles explained that the precinct had been profaned, the king searched it and discovered the infant. He ordered that it should be exposed on Mt Parthenion, and handed his daughter over to Nauplios to be sold in a foreign land. Nauplios offered her to Teuthras as a wife, however, and things went well for her exposed son too, for he was suckled by a doe in the wilds until he was rescued by some shepherds. By a characteristically tortured etymology, it could thus be explained that he was called Telephos because he had been suckled at the teat (*thēlē*) of a deer (*elaphos*). When he came of age, he travelled to Delphi to question the oracle about his birth, and was advised to cross over to Mysia, where he was reunited with his mother. Since Teuthras had no children of his own, he adopted his wife's son, who succeeded to the throne shortly before the Trojan War.⁴⁶ To pass on to Diodorus' account, Aleos noticed that Auge had become pregnant, and refused to believe her when she told him that she had been raped by Heracles. Imagining that the trouble had really arisen because she had engaged in an illicit love affair, he handed her over to Nauplios, asking that she should be taken out to sea to be drowned. She gave birth to her child on Mt Parthenion during the journey to the coast and hid him away in some bushes. Nauplios took him to his home city, the port of Nauplia or Nauplion in the Argolid, where he passed her on to some Carian travellers who were setting out for Asia Minor. Her story ended happily as a consequence, for they entrusted her to Teuthras after arriving home in Asia. Her abandoned child was suckled by a doe as usual until he was discovered by some herdsmen, who took him to their master, a local ruler called Corythos. He was raised by Corythos and eventually rediscovered his mother in the way described above.⁴⁷ Or, in a simpler version of the story, Auge took him with her after giving birth to him on Mt Parthenion, and Nauplios sold the pair of them to Teuthras, who took Auge as his wife and adopted her son.⁴⁸

The earliest surviving account of Auge's story, in a text on papyrus from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, differs from all the rest in so far as Heracles is said to have seduced Auge in Asia rather than in Arcadia, while he was travelling to Troy to confront its ruler, Laomedon, who had failed to hand over a reward that he had promised to him (see p. 250). Teuthras had previously taken Auge into his home and had reared her as a daughter, but the details of the story are lost; it is indicated, however, that she was of Arcadian birth as in the subsequent tradition.⁴⁹

Telephos appeared in a famous legend connected with the outbreak of the Trojan War. When the Greeks first arrived in Asia, they attacked Mysia in the mistaken belief that it was Troy, and Telephos was wounded by Achilles while chasing them from his land, but later agreed to guide them to their proper destination in circumstances explained above (see p. 462)

The legend of Atalanta in Arcadia and Boeotia

Two separate provinces, Arcadia and Boeotia, claimed to have produced an Amazonian heroine named ATALANTA. The Arcadian Atalanta was descended from Lycourgos, king of Tegea, through his son Iasos (or Iasios, or Iasion), while the Boeotian Atalanta was a daughter of Schoineus, son of Athamas, the eponym of the Boeotian town of Schoinos.⁵⁰ It is difficult to tell whether these were originally separate figures, or whether alternative traditions came to be developed about a single Atalanta in the different regions. As far as can be judged from the surviving evidence, the Atalanta who attended the Calydonian boar-hunt (see p. 385) and was exposed at birth by her father (see below) was always regarded as an Arcadian, while the legend of Atalanta's bridal-races was primarily associated with the Boeotian heroine of that name. So it is certainly possible that there were two Atalantas of separate origin; but even if this was the case, the two came to be confused or identified with each other from a quite early period, and it will therefore be convenient to treat the Arcadian and Boeotian as a single person, taking due note of any regional distinctions.

When Atalanta was born in Arcadia, her father Iasos ordered that she should be exposed in the wilds because he wanted male children alone. After she was abandoned on Mt Parthenion, however, she was suckled by a she-wolf that had lost its cubs, and she was eventually rescued by some passing hunters. They brought her up in the mountains and she chose to remain there when she grew up, living a hardy life as a virgin huntress with a cave for a home. When two drunken Centaurs called Rhoicos and Hylaios once approached her cave at night with the intention of raping her, she was alerted by the sight of their torches and shot them dead with two successive arrows.⁵¹ She demonstrated similar valour and skill when she subsequently ventured abroad, showing that she could match herself against any male hero. Although Diodorus and Apollodorus list her among the Argonauts,⁵² it is most unlikely that she would have been included in their number in the early tradition. Apollonius explains that she asked to join the expedition, but that Jason – who had met her in Arcadia and had received a spear from her as a gift – was unwilling to take her because he feared that other members of the crew might fall in love with her and quarrel.⁵³ During the period between the voyage of the Argonauts and the hunt for the Calydonian boar, Atalanta travelled to Iolcos to compete in the funeral games for Pelias and defeated Peleus in the wrestling (see p. 428).⁵⁴ She played a prominent part in the great boar-hunt, as has already been described (see pp. 385ff), and it was agreed that she performed her greatest heroic exploits on that occasion. She inflicted the first wound on the boar in the usual account, and Meleager, the leader of the hunt, was so impressed by her bravery that he awarded

her the prize of honour even though he himself killed the boar.⁵⁵ She brought the spoils home with her, and the most durable of them, the huge tusks of the boar, could be seen in Tegea accordingly until they were plundered by Augustus. Its hide was still there when Pausanias visited the town, but now shrivelled by time and without a single bristle.⁵⁶

When Atalanta's father eventually insisted that she should settle down and marry, she tried to escape marriage by forcing her suitors to compete with her in a race at the risk of their lives. If she had been exposed at birth, as in her Arcadian legend, it is of course hard to see how her parents could have had any occasion or motive to put pressure on her to marry (even if Apollodorus cobbles an account together by saying that she was reunited with her parents after her foreign adventures, and that her father then urged her to marry).⁵⁷ It thus seems likely that this legend of the bridal-races was originally developed in connection with a Boeotian Atalanta who was reared at home. The theme is first attested in some fragments from the Hesiodic *Catalogue* in which Schoineus, the Boeotian father of Atalanta, announces the conditions of the contest to the assembled suitors.⁵⁸ In contrast to the more usual pattern in which the father of the bride competes against her suitors (as in the case of Oinomaos and Hippodameia, see p. 420), Atalanta confronted her suitors in person in order to rid herself of them. According to Apollodorus, she marked out a course for a foot-race, knocking a stake into the ground halfway along it; and she told her suitors to set off from that point, saying that she would chase after them from the starting-point fully armed. If she caught up with any suitor within the limits of the course, he would pay with his life, for she would thrust her spear into his back; but he would be able to claim her as his wife if he should reach the end of the course ahead of her.⁵⁹ After she had outrun and killed a number of her suitors, a young man eventually escaped her with the benefit of some aid from Aphrodite. According to the Boeotian tradition, the successful suitor was HIPPOMENES, a son of Megareus, king of Onchestos (a city in southern Boeotia); or in the Arcadian tradition, he was MEILANION (or Melanion), son of Amphidamas, who was a cousin of Lycourgos and thus, a cousin of Atalanta.⁶⁰

The successful suitor, whether Hippomenes or Meilanion, contrived his victory by praying for the assistance of Aphrodite, who could be expected to sympathize with him as the goddess of love. She provided him with some golden apples (or three such apples specifically) and told him to throw them down one after another during the race and so cause Atalanta to be left behind as she delayed to pick them up.⁶¹ It was sometimes said that these apples came from the Hesperides, like those fetched by Heracles (see p. 225); or, in Ovid's account, the goddess brought them from her sacred grove at Tamasus in Cyprus, which contained an apple tree with golden leaves and branches.⁶² There are traces of an alternative tradition in which Meilanion won the favour of Atalanta by helping her in various ways during her hunting trips.⁶³

It was often said that Atalanta and her husband were transformed into lions soon after their marriage. The story can be traced back to the fourth century BC but was probably rather older. According to the earliest complete account in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hippomenes angered Aphrodite by failing to thank her for having

provided him with the golden apples. So she incited the couple to make love in a cave that was sacred to the Mother of the Gods (here identified with Cybele) while they were travelling home; and the Mother punished them for the sacrilege by turning them into lions. Or, in another version that was probably of earlier origin, the couple suffered this punishment because they desecrated a precinct of Zeus by making love in it while they were out hunting.⁶⁴ Some Latin sources add that they were never able to make love again after their transformation because lions and lionesses never mate with one another (for the bizarre idea had arisen that lions do not mate among themselves but only with leopards).⁶⁵ Parthenopaios (the Maiden-born, one of the Seven against Thebes, see p. 355) was often said to have been Atalanta's son, whether by her husband Meilanion, or by Meleager, or Ares.⁶⁶

A final miscellany

Sisyphos, king of Corinth, and the thief Autolykos

Passing towards the Isthmus from Arcadia, we arrive at the city of Corinth, which was said to have been founded by SISYPHOS, one of the seven sons of Aiolos. In full accord with his subsequent reputation, the *Iliad* refers to him as the most cunning of men, and says that he lived in the city of Ephyre in a corner of horse-rearing Argos.⁶⁷ Although it is far from certain that this was the same place as Corinth, the two cities were identified in the subsequent tradition, and Sisyphos and his family came to be associated with Corinth even if they did not originally belong there. The main outlines of the family history were established by Homer's time, for the poet refers to Sisyphos as a son of Aiolos, the eponym of the Aeolians, and as the grandfather of the great hero Bellerophon through his son Glaucos.⁶⁸ The genealogical system that presented Aiolos as being the ancestor of many notable families in different parts of Greece (see pp. 379–80) would have been developed at a later period, but that development made no difference to the mythology of the Sisyphids, whose myths never bring them into connection with their supposed relations in other branches of the family.

Craftiness always remained the defining feature of Sisyphos' character, and he was commonly portrayed as a not unappealing rogue. As has been mentioned in previous discussion of the myths of the Underworld, he was said to have been punished in the afterlife by constantly having to roll a huge stone uphill, however much it came rolling down again. No explanation is offered for this punishment when it is first described in the *Odyssey*, but later sources say that it was imposed on him because he had cheated death on a previous occasion or had betrayed a secret of Zeus. The following story, recounted by Pherecydes, lay behind both of these explanations. When Zeus abducted Aigina, a daughter of the Peloponnesian river-god Asopos, from her birthplace (see p. 426), he took her through the territory ruled by Sisyphos, who informed Asopos of that fact when he came in search of her, in return for the creation of a spring on the Corinthian Acropolis. Zeus was so angry that he sent Thanatos (Death personified) to haul Sisyphos down to the Underworld; but

Sisyphos contrived to tie him up, so making it impossible for anyone else to die until Ares finally came to his rescue and delivered Sisyphos into his hands. This was not the end of the matter, however, because Sisyphos soon devised another trick. For before departing he told his wife not to perform the proper funeral rites for him, and he then complained of this to Hades and Persephone when he arrived below, asking to be allowed to make a brief visit to the world above to remind his wife of her duties; but after gaining that permission, he simply stayed at Corinth until he died for a second time, now of old age.⁶⁹

Sisyphos ranks with Autolykos and Odysseus in heroic legend as one of the three great masters of deception and trickery, and the three were brought into connection with one another in the other main myth that is recorded of him. Not to put too fine a point on the matter, AUTOLYCOS was a notorious and consummate thief. Homer remarks that he 'surpassed all men in thieving and perjury', having been taught these skills by Hermes in return for the fine sacrifices that he was in the custom of offering to him.⁷⁰ He lived on Mt Parnassos in Central Greece with his wife Amphithea, and was the grandfather of Odysseus through his daughter Anticleia. When Odysseus came back to his palace in disguise after returning from the Trojan War, his nurse recognized him from a wound that he had received while hunting wild boar with his grandfather on Parnassos.⁷¹

Subsequent authors elaborated on the skills of Autolykos, saying that Hermes had given him the power to escape detection when he stole anything, and to alter the appearance of what he had stolen. He was able, for instance, to alter the colours and markings of cattle, and to give them horns or deprive them of their horns; and he applied these skills, perhaps imprudently for once, to steal large numbers of cattle from the herds of Sisyphos. Although Sisyphos became convinced that Autolykos was stealing from him because his own herds were diminishing as those of Autolykos increased, he was unable to prove it because Autolykos had altered the appearance of his cattle. So he set a trap for the thief by marking the hooves of his cattle with his name, or with the inscription 'Autolykos stole me'; and when Autolykos stole from his herds once again, he followed him to his home on Mt Parnassos, identified the stolen cattle from the telltale inscriptions, and reclaimed all that had been taken from him.⁷²

Some claimed that Sisyphos was the true father of the wily Odysseus, saying that he secretly seduced Autolykos' daughter Anticleia (or raped her when drunk) while visiting Autolykos to recover his cattle, causing her to become pregnant with Odysseus, who was reared by Laertes as his own son after she became his wife.⁷³

If Homer described Hermes as merely being the benefactor who endowed Autolykos with his dubious talents, Hermes came to be regarded as his father. According to Pherecydes, Deion, son of Aiolos, a brother of Sisyphos who ruled the land of Phocis in Central Greece, had a daughter called Philonis who attracted the desire of two Olympian gods, Hermes and Apollo; and both slept with her on the same day, and she thus conceived the thief Autolykos to the former and the musician Philammon to the latter. Both spent their lives on Parnassos, the mountain that dominated their grandfather's realm. Philammon fathered Thamyras, an even greater musician than himself, on a Parnassian nymph named Argiope, who gave birth to

her child in Thrace, where he would later engage in his famous contest with the Muses (see p. 192).⁷⁴

Glaucos, son of Sisyphos

To return to Sisyphos and his family, nothing is reported of his activities as ruler of Corinth except that he was supposed to have founded the Isthmian Games in honour of Melicertes (see p. 394) after the boy's body was put ashore on the Isthmus of Corinth by a dolphin.⁷⁵ He married Merope, a daughter of Atlas, who bore him one notable son, GLAUCOS.⁷⁶ Although various other sons came to be attributed to him, only one is worth mentioning here, Ornytion, who was said to have been the ancestor of subsequent kings of Corinth (see p. 555) and was the father of Antiope's husband Phocos (see p. 427).

Glaucos was remembered more for the remarkable manner of his death than for anything that he did during his lifetime, for he was said to have been torn apart by his own chariot-horses. Various explanations were offered to account for this. Some said that he had fed them on human flesh in the hope of making them more dangerous to his enemies in battle, but that when he was obliged to feed them on dull vegetarian food while attending the funeral-games for Pelias, they satisfied their craving for red meat by devouring their master.⁷⁷ Or Aphrodite sent them mad to punish Glaucos for scorning her rites, or because she was angry that he had prevented his horses from mating in the hope of making them swifter.⁷⁸ Or else the beasts were driven into a homicidal frenzy because they ate a special grass at Potniai in Boeotia, which had a maddening effect on horses,⁷⁹ or they drank water from a well there that had that effect.⁸⁰ Glaucos became a malicious ghost in any case as a result of the terrible death that he suffered, turning into the TARAXIPPOS or 'Horse-scarer' who was supposed to cause panic among the chariot-horses during races at the Isthmian Games (which were held near Corinth).⁸¹ There was also another Taraxippos who haunted the hippodrome at Olympia.⁸²

He fathered a hero of far greater stature than himself in the monster-slayer Bellerophon (or Bellerophonotes),⁸³ the only son borne to him by his wife Eurymede (or Eurynome), daughter of Nisos. Bellerophon's adventures and feats, achieved far from Corinth, have already been described in another connection (see pp. 221–2). According to an alternative account, however, he was merely the putative father of Bellerophon, who was really a son of Poseidon; and in that case his marital affairs were more complicated than in the usual tradition. For Sisyphos initially chose Mestra, the shapeshifting daughter of Erysichthon (see p. 114) as a bride for Glaucos, so we are told in a fragment from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, but she soon fled back to her father's house, doubtless by use of her special powers. Although Sisyphos was justifiably angered by this, all the more because he had paid valuable bride-gifts to her father, Zeus had other plans for her, and she was carried away to Cos by Poseidon and bore two sons to him. So Sisyphos was obliged to choose another bride for his son, 'a daughter of Pandionides' (presumably his usual wife as named above, who was a granddaughter of Pandion, king of Athens); and even though the marriage endured on this occasion, Zeus had no wish that Glaucos should father

children by this second wife either, and she bore her son Bellerophon to Poseidon instead.⁸⁴

Since Bellerophon had to leave Corinth, never to return, after committing manslaughter (see p. 220), Glaucos had no heir to succeed him, and the throne passed to a certain THOAS. According to Pausanias' summary of the mythical history of Corinth, he was a grandson of Sisypheus through the above-mentioned Ornytion, and the city remained under the rule of his branch of the family for three generations, until the Heraclid Aletes seized power there with the support of a Dorian army (see p. 283).⁸⁵ This last legend explained why the city had a Dorian population in historical times.

Other aspects of the mythology of Corinth

Such was the standard account of the mythical history of Corinth, in which it was said to be ruled by the family of Sisypheus, but it must be said that there is very little that is distinctively Corinthian about the myths of Sisypheus or his two notable descendants. The early Corinthian epic poet Eumelos offered an account of the city's earliest history in which it had been under the rule of another family before the arrival of Sisypheus. According to him, the territory of Corinth was originally awarded to Aletes, the future king of Colchis, by his father the sun-god Helios, who awarded the adjoining 'Asopian land' (i.e. region of Sicyon to the west) to another son of his called Aloeus. When Aletes left for Colchis (where he would later be visited by Jason and the Argonauts, see p. 405), he entrusted his property on the isthmus to a certain Bounos, son of Hermes. After the death of Bounos, both territories fell under the control of Epopeus, son of Aloeus, who bequeathed them to his son Marathon. To escape his father's violence and lawlessness, Marathon took refuge in Attica (hence the name of the village of Marathon in the north-east), only making a brief visit to his original homeland after his father's death to divide it between his two sons Corinthos and Sicyon, who gave their names to the territories that they came to rule. When Corinthos subsequently died without a male heir, the Corinthians invited Medea, the daughter of Aletes, to become their queen, and she ruled there for a time in conjunction with her husband Jason. As she gave birth to each of her children, she hid them away in the sanctuary of Hera in the hope of making them immortal, but they died in every case, and Jason was so appalled when he finally learned of this that he sailed away to Iolcos. After being abandoned by her husband, Medea decided to leave also, and transferred the kingdom to Sisypheus (who was thus the first ruler in a new Aiolid line in this account rather than the city's founder).⁸⁶

The visit of Jason and Medea to Corinth was assuredly the most notable feature of its mythology apart from the legends of Sisypheus himself, see further on p. 412. In the most familiar version of the story as found in Euripides' *Medea*, the poet makes no effort to integrate it into the mythical history of the city, and Jason and Medea are presented as living there as guests of a king called Creon, whose commonplace name, which simply means 'Ruler', would suggest that he was first invented for the role that he plays in this story (even if the scholia to the play indicate that

mythographers subsequently found a way to insert him into the royal line).⁸⁷

It should finally be mentioned that the Corinthians liked to believe that their city was named after a certain Corinthos who was a son of Zeus, but this was regarded as something of a joke by the other Greeks, to such a degree, indeed, that the very phrase 'Corinthos, son of Zeus' became a proverbial phrase for a piece of tiresome nonsense.⁸⁸

Three romantic legends from Patrai

Before leaving the Peloponnese, it would be a shame to pass over some romantic legends that were collected by Pausanias at Patrai, a coastal town in the northern province of Achaia.

Not far from Patrai, near the mouth of the river Selemnos, there was once a town called Argyra (although it was no more than a ruin by Pausanias' time). According to local legend, a handsome shepherd boy called SELEMNOS had once lived in that area, and had attracted the love of a sea-nymph called ARGYRA, who used to emerge from the sea to consort with him; but she ceased to visit him when his beauty began to fade, and he died of a broken heart. Aphrodite, as the goddess who presided over love, took pity on him and transformed him into the river Selemnos; and when he continued to yearn for Argyra even in his new form, she granted him the additional favour of causing him to forget his love. Ever afterwards, so it was claimed, the river would confer the same favour on anyone who bathed in it, causing men and women alike to forget their passions. Pausanias, who rarely makes any personal observations, feels impelled to remark that if this is really the case, the waters of the Selemnos are of greater worth than a large amount of money.⁸⁹

At Patrai itself, there was a sanctuary of Artemis Tricaria at which human sacrifices were said to have been offered in early times. According to the temple legend, a maiden called COMAITHO had once served as a priestess in the temple long before the Trojan War, and had fallen in love with a young man called MELANIPPOS; but their parents had refused to allow them to marry, and they had consummated their passion in secret, making love inside the temple on more than one occasion. In her anger at the sacrilege, Artemis afflicted the land with famine and disease; and when the local people sought the advice of the Delphic oracle, they were told not only that the guilty couple should be offered in sacrifice to Artemis, but also that the most attractive youth and maiden in the area should be offered up to her likewise in each successive year. The oracle indicated that the Patraians would be relieved of this painful duty when a foreign king arrived in their land with a foreign deity, an event that finally occurred in the following circumstances just after the Trojan War. During the division of the spoils after the sack of Troy, EURYPYLOS, son of Euaimon, a Thessalian ruler, was given a most precious object, a chest containing a statue of Dionysos that had been fashioned by Hephaistos; this statue had been passed down in the Trojan royal family ever since it had been presented to the first king, Dardanos, by his father Zeus. Since Cassandra had put a curse on any Greek who found the statue, Eurypylos was driven mad when he opened the chest to look at it. He was sufficiently lucid at times, however, to be able to consult the

Delphic oracle, which told him to settle in a land where he found a people offering a strange sacrifice and to install the chest there for worship. When his ship was then blown to the northern coast of the Peloponnese in the region of Patrai, he stepped ashore there and saw a maiden and youth being led to the altar of Artemis for that year's sacrifice. He realized at once that this must be the sacrifice that the oracle had meant; and on seeing this foreign king in their land, the Patraians recalled the oracle that they had received long before and checked whether he had a god inside the chest, as was indeed the case. So Eurypylos was delivered from his madness and the people of Patrai from their human sacrifices. In historical times, they offered sacrifice to Eurypylos every year in connection with their festival of Dionysos.⁹⁰

Patrai was a place of no great importance until Augustus placed a colony there after defeating Marcus Antonius. Among some plunder from Aetolia that was deposited at the city by the emperor, there was an ancient statue of Dionysos from Calydon, which thus came to be housed in the Patraian temple of Calydonian Dionysos; the following tale, which is set in its place of origin on the mainland opposite, was recounted in connection with it. A Calydonian priest of Dionysos called CORESOS had fallen in love with a maiden called CALLIRHOE, but the more he pressed himself on her the less she liked him. Finding that all his pleas and promises made no impression on her, he prayed to the cultic image (apparently for vengeance rather than assistance), and Dionysos responded by afflicting the Calydonians with a madness that caused many of them to die insane. When they sought the advice of the oracle of Zeus at Dodona, they were told that Dionysos was to blame, and that his anger would not be allayed until Coresos had sacrificed a human victim to him, either Callirhoe or someone who volunteered to take her place. As Callirhoe was being brought to the altar, Coresos found that his love for her outweighed his meaner feelings of resentment, and sacrificed himself to the god in place of her as a willing substitute. On seeing him lying dead at her feet, Callirhoe felt pity for him and remorse at the way that she had treated him, and killed herself in her turn, cutting her throat by a local spring that was known by her name ever afterwards.⁹¹

The Minyans of Orchomenos; the master-builders Trophonios and Agamedes

The province of Boeotia in Central Greece, running north-westward from Attica, ranked with the Argolid as an important centre for early heroic myth, and we have thus had much to say about it in connection with the mythical history of Thebes; but although Thebes was very much the dominant city, Orchomenos in the north-west of the province, which controlled the fertile lowlands around the Copaic Lake, would have been a place of comparable significance in the Mycenaean period. It was proverbial for its wealth, which is compared in the *Iliad* to that of the Egyptian city of Thebes.⁹² Its star declined, however, and its mythical record is disappointingly thin. In the Homeric epics and Greek tradition generally, it was regarded as the main home of the Minyans, an ancient people who were also associated with Iolcos in Thessaly. MINYAS, the eponym of the Minyans, was thought to have been an early ruler of Orchomenos. It was naturally assumed that he must have been extremely

rich, and a Mycenaean beehive tomb in the city was identified as his treasure-house; Pausanias cites it along with the walls of Tiryns (also of Mycenaean origin) as a Greek monuments that bore comparison with the pyramids of Egypt.⁹³ For the story of the Minyades, three daughters of Minyas who scorned the rites of Dionysos when they were first introduced to Orchomenos, see p. 169. Minyas was credited with various other children, including Orchomenos, the eponym of the city, Elara, the mother of the gigantic Tityos (see p. 141), and Clymene, the wife of Phylacos and maternal grandmother of Jason.

The first Orchomenian ruler to play a role of any significance in mythical history is ERGINOS, son of Clymenos, who imposed a tribute on the Thebans after his father was killed by a man of that city; Heracles delivered them from this in his first campaign, as has already been recounted, leading them to victory against the Minyans and killing Erginos (see p. 240).⁹⁴ Heracles was supposed to have greatly reduced the wealth and power of Orchomenos at that time, whether by simply inflicting a crushing defeat and razing the city, or by redirecting the river Cephisos to flood the plains to the east it, and so creating or extending the great Copaic Lake, which covered so much of northern Boeotia.⁹⁵ An elaborate but highly artificial account of the dynastic history of Orchomenos, up to the reign of Erginos and beyond, can be found in Pausanias.⁹⁶

According to one tradition at least, TROPHONIOS and AGAMEDES, the famous mythical builders and architects, were born at Orchomenos as sons of Erginos;⁹⁷ and it is certainly the case that they were primarily associated with Boeotia and Central Greece (although various buildings in the Peloponnese came to be attributed to them, and Agamedes was of Arcadian birth in one account, see p. 550). Some of their buildings were imaginary structures, which were the mythical precursors of buildings of ordinary human workmanship on the same sites, as was the case with their wooden temple of Poseidon at Mantinea (see p. 550)⁹⁸ or their stone temple of Apollo at Delphi. The latter temple was said to have been the fourth of a series of five, as the successor to a temple of bronze that had been built there by Hephaistos (see p. 179) and the predecessor of the historical temple.⁹⁹ Other buildings that were described as their work were Mycenaean structures whose original purpose had long been forgotten, such as the 'house of Amphitryon' at Thebes or the 'treasure-house of Hyrieus' at Hyria in eastern Boeotia.¹⁰⁰

According to one tradition, the two brothers died together in the happiest of circumstances after building the above-mentioned temple at Delphi; for when they prayed to Apollo for a reward, asking to be granted whatever is best for man, the god indicated that this would come to them in three (or seven) days, and on that day they were granted a sudden and painless death.¹⁰¹ The story may well have been inspired by the well-known legend of CLEOBIS and BITON, in which the sons of an Argive priestess of Hera at Argos were said to have met their death in much the same way. When they were once planning to drive their mother Cydippe to the festival of the goddess in an ox-cart, the oxen happened to be late in returning from the fields; and since time was running short, the two brothers harnessed themselves to the cart instead and dragged their mother from the city of Argos to the great temple of Hera, a distance of forty-five stades (more than five miles). Their mother was so proud of

their action and the acclaim that they won by it that she addressed a special prayer to Hera, asking that they should be granted the greatest blessing that mortals can receive, and the goddess rewarded them by granting them a peaceful death on that same day, while they were lying asleep after the sacrifices and feasting. Herodotus remarks encouragingly that this was a god-given proof of how much better it is to be dead than alive.¹⁰²

In a less creditable tale, Trophonios and Agamedes came to a bad end when they tried to steal from the treasure-house of Hyrieus. By leaving a stone loose during the construction of the building, they had ensured that they would be able to creep into it afterwards to plunder the treasures; but when the king noticed that his treasure was diminishing even though the locks and seals remained untouched, he laid a trap inside, and Agamedes was snared in it. Fearing that his brother might be forced to name him as his accomplice, Trophonios cut off his head, leaving Hyrieus with an anonymous corpse.¹⁰³ He then fled, and was usually said to have been swallowed up by the earth at Lebadeia in western Boeotia, where his celebrated oracle was located in historical times.¹⁰⁴ In another version of the treasure-house story set in Elis, Agamedes was ensnared while he and his brother were stealing from the treasure-house of Augeias, who had set a trap in it on the advice of the ingenious Daidalos. Trophonios fled to Lebadeia as in the other version, while Cercyon, son of Agamedes, who had also participated in the crime, fled to Athens.¹⁰⁵ Herodotus recounts a very similar story about two brothers who had been stealing from the treasure-house of Rhampsinitos, king of Egypt.¹⁰⁶

It was said that the oracle of Trophonios at Lebadeia had been first discovered in the following way. When Boeotia had once suffered a drought for two years, the cities of the land sent some ambassadors to Delphi to consult the oracle, which ordered them to go to Lebadeia to seek a cure from Trophonios. Although they could find no sign of an oracle when they first arrived there, the oldest of the envoys, a certain Saon, caught sight of a swarm of bees and followed them until they disappeared into a cleft in the earth. This proved to be the site of the oracle of Trophonios, and Saon was instructed in its rites and procedures by the dead hero himself.¹⁰⁷ Those who wanted to consult Trophonios would descend on their own into a kiln-shaped chasm in the earth, and lie down at the bottom, pushing their feet into a narrow opening between the wall and the floor; they would then be drawn through the opening, as if caught up by the current of a rushing river, and would be returned in the same way after receiving a revelation from the hero. The experience was so terrifying that people who visited Trophonios were said to be incapable of laughing for some time afterwards, or even for the rest of their life according to popular lore.¹⁰⁸

Phlegyas and the Phlegyans

The Phlegyans (Phlegyai) were a violent people associated with north-western Boeotia, and also southern Thessaly in some accounts, who were notorious for having raided the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi under the leadership of their ruler, PHLEGYAS, a son of the war-god Ares. They were evidently a byword for bellicosity

from an early period, for it is stated in the *Iliad* that Ares and his son Phobos (Fear personified) used to venture out of their Thracian homeland to fight alongside them in battle.¹⁰⁹ Later sources report that they lived as outlaws, preying on their neighbours and paying no heed to the gods,¹¹⁰ until they finally went so far as to direct an attack against Delphi, the ultimate outrage that caused their downfall. Although Philammon, a son of Apollo who was better known for his music than for his martial prowess (see p. 554), tried to turn them away from the sacred place with a picked force of Argives, the Phlegyans killed him in battle and succeeded in their immediate aim; but they were punished for their sacrilege afterwards by Apollo himself, who destroyed all but a few of them by means of earthquakes and repeated lightning-strikes, followed by a plague.¹¹¹ Or, according to some, Phlegyas tried to burn down Apollo's temple as an act of revenge, in anger at the death of his daughter Coronis, an unfaithful mistress of Apollo who had been killed at the god's behest (see p. 143); Apollo shot him dead, however, and sent him down to Hades where he suffered the punishment that he deserved.¹¹² According to the *Aeneid*, a rock hangs over him forever, constantly threatening to crash down on him (a motif borrowed from the mythology of Tantalos, see p. 106), and he calls out through the infernal gloom, warning others to learn from his sufferings, by adhering to justice and holding the gods in proper respect.¹¹³

Phlegyas was said to have been borne to Ares either by Dotis, whose name associates her with the Dotian Fields in Thessaly, or by Chryse, a member of the Orchomenian royal family.¹¹⁴ As the former genealogy would indicate, Phlegyas was sometimes regarded as a Thessalian, particularly in his role as the father of Coronis, the Thessalian mother of Asclepios.¹¹⁵ Other reports make him the father of Ixion,¹¹⁶ allying him to the Lapiths of Thessaly (none too appropriately, for the Lapiths were a heroic people of very different character to the brigandly Phlegyans, see p. 311). The legends of the Phlegyans tend to locate them in Central Greece, however, in the area to the west of the Copaic Lake. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* refers to them accordingly as an overbearing and impious people who lived in a town set in a beautiful glade near the Cephisian (i.e. Copaic) Lake, the place in question perhaps being Phlegya, a town near Orchomenos of which Phlegyas could be regarded as the eponym.¹¹⁷ In Pausanias' late and artificial account of the Orchomenian succession, Phlegyas is fitted into the royal line, though not without some awkwardness;¹¹⁸ or, in some accounts, the Phlegyans are shifted further west to the Phocian city of Daulis, evidently because of its proximity to Delphi.¹¹⁹ According to Pherecydes, Zethos and Amphion fortified Thebes to protect it against the Phlegyans, who seized it nonetheless after the death of the two brothers (see further on p. 341).¹²⁰

The myths of the great hunter Orion

ORION was a notable figure from early legend who came to be identified with the very striking group of stars that it still known as the constellation Orion. Although he was evidently a major hero in the earliest tradition, as is amply attested by the way in which the Homeric epics refer to him, and by the very fact that a splendid

constellation had come to be named after him by Homer's time, it would seem that this great hunter of Boeotian legend came to be regarded as a somewhat crude and primitive figure as time progressed, for he was eclipsed by heroes like Perseus and Heracles, and sank into relative obscurity. The picture that is presented of him in the surviving literature is both skewed and incomplete as a consequence, since the richest material is provided by astronomical sources, which are primarily concerned to explain how he came to be transferred to the heavens, and we thus have many accounts of his death that are mainly of relatively late origin, but little record of his earlier life and old Boeotian legends.

Orion appears in two guises in the Homeric epics, as a mighty hunter of long ago who still pursues his favourite activity during his posthumous life in the Underworld, and as the celestial hunter who strides through the sky above as the constellation Orion.¹²¹ Odysseus sees him among the shades of the dead during his visit to the Underworld, herding wild beasts together over the fields of asphodel with a large bronze club in his hand, these beasts apparently being the ghosts of those that he had killed during his earthly life; and the *Iliad* mentions that the mighty Orion appears as a constellation in the sky, where he is accompanied by his hunting dog (a reference to Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, the associated constellation of the Dog being of later invention), and causes anxiety to the Bear, who keeps a wary eye on him from her station by the northern pole of the sky.¹²² Although he is pictured as being of gigantic size, being described in the *Odyssey* as being even bigger than the gigantic Alodai (see p. 84), he is not yet the uncouth being of the later tradition, for Homer calls him the most beautiful of mortals and tells how the ever-susceptible dawn-goddess Eos fell in love with him, causing resentment among the gods, who incited Artemis to shoot him.¹²³

Two conflicting accounts of his birth appear in later sources. According to Pherecydes and 'Hesiod' (in the *Astronomy* or possibly the *Catalogue*), he was borne to Poseidon by Euryale, a daughter of Minos,¹²⁴ and was thus born in Crete (which was a favourite location for stories of his death). Or, in another account, which first appears in Hellenistic times, he was born from the earth in Boeotia in most extraordinary circumstances. When Hyrieus, the eponymous founder of Hyria in eastern Boeotia (see p. 440), was once entertaining Zeus, Poseidon, and Hermes at his home, they rewarded him for his gracious hospitality by allowing him to choose what he most desired; and being childless and indeed unmarried, he asked to be granted a son. So they emitted some semen (or else urinated, the relevant Greek verb could carry both meanings) into the hide of an ox that he had sacrificed to them, and ordered that it should be buried in the earth for ten (lunar) months; and a child duly emerged from the ground at the end of that period. He was called Ourion initially on account of his origin, but his name was later shortened to Orion for reasons of delicacy.¹²⁵ Apollodorus presumably had this story in mind when writing that Orion was earth-born.¹²⁶ In the usual tradition, as we have seen (p. 440), Hyrieus was said to have fathered sons of his own through a marriage to a nymph. Orion seems to have been more closely associated with Tanagra than with Hyria; and his tomb could be seen in Tanagra in south-eastern Boeotia, which is mentioned accordingly as having been his home; indeed, a scholiast reports that 'most people say that Orion

was a Tanagran'.¹²⁷ The Tanagran poetess Corinna mentions him several times in the scanty remains of her verse, referring to him as the lord of Boeotia, and Euphoriion states that Hemera (Day, here to be identified with Eos) took him from Tanagra when she carried him away.¹²⁸ He married a woman called Side who can also be counted as Boeotian, since she was regarded as the eponym of the Boeotian town of Sidai and her name corresponds to the Boeotian term for a pomegranate. She was consigned to the Underworld by Hera while still quite young for having dared to claim that she rivalled the goddess in beauty.¹²⁹ It may be relevant to the origin of this myth that the pomegranate had Underworld associations, as we saw in connection with Persephone (see p. 95).

According to another Boeotian tale, which was recounted in a lost poem by Corinna, Orion had two daughters, Metioche and Menippe, known as the Coronides. They were reared in Boeotia after their father's death and sacrificed their lives to save their homeland from a plague. For when an oracle revealed that the infernal gods who had inflicted the plague would be appeased if two maidens offered themselves up to them in sacrifice, the daughters of Orion cried out three times to the gods below that they were offering themselves as willing victims and cut their throats with the shuttles from their looms. Feeling pity for the two maidens, Hades and Persephone caused their bodies to disappear and two comets to rise up into the sky in place of them. They were honoured as the Coronides ever afterwards at Orchomenos, where the young people would bring them expiatory offerings of honey each year.¹³⁰

After the premature death of his Boeotian wife Side, Orion crossed over to Chios to seek the hand of Merope, daughter of Oinopion. This Oinopion (Wine-face) was a son of Dionysos and Ariadne who had left Naxos, the island of his birth, to become the ruler of Chios, an island that was renowned for the quality of its wine. It was said that the arts of viniculture and wine making were introduced to the island by Oinopion, who had learned them from Dionysos himself; and the Chians liked to claim accordingly that they had been the first people in the world to make red wine.¹³¹ Although Orion tried to win the favour of his prospective father-in-law by clearing the island of wild beasts, Oinopion was reluctant to give his daughter to such an uncouth being and constantly deferred the wedding. Orion grew increasingly impatient and finally broke into Merope's room one night while he was drunk and raped her. On learning of this outrage, Oinopion blinded him as he was lying asleep afterwards, and cast him out on the shore, or drove him out of the island.

Having no idea where he was heading or indeed where he should try to go, Orion wandered helplessly around the Aegean. He was able to roam unrestrictedly because he was gifted with the power, acquired from his father Poseidon, of being able to walk over the sea (or at least wade through it with ease). In the end he happened to find himself on the island of Lemnos, where the divine blacksmith Hephaistos, who had his forge there, took pity on him and offered him his assistant, Cedalion, as a guide. Hoisting Cedalion on to his shoulders, he headed east towards the sunrise as directed by him, until he was able to find a cure for his blindness by turning his face towards the rays of the rising sun, or else was healed by the sun-god Helios himself. Although he hurried back to Chios to exact revenge on Oinopion, the king escaped

him by hiding in an underground chamber that had been prepared for him by his people, or by Hephaistos at the order of Poseidon.¹³²

The conflicting tales about Orion's death are generally set on one or other of the Greek islands. This is already the case in the Homeric account mentioned above, in which Artemis shot him on Ortygia (often identified with Delos in later sources) after Eos had abducted him to that island. Artemis took this action because the gods disapproved of love affairs between goddesses and mortal men; or, in a later variation, she killed Orion on Delos for trying to rape Oupis, one of the Hyperborean maidens who brought offerings to the island after the birth of Apollo and Artemis (see p. 142).¹³³ Or, in a version that first appears in Callimachus, Orion incurred this fate by attempting to court or rape Artemis herself.¹³⁴

In the astronomical literature, however, from the Hellenistic period onwards, a wholly different story comes to be favoured in which Orion is said to have been killed by a giant scorpion. As with the myth of his pursuit of the Pleiades, which will be considered below, this is a true astral myth that was directly inspired by an observable feature of the night sky; for since the constellation of the Scorpion rises as Orion sets below the horizon, it seems to pursue him through the sky. In the standard version of this astral myth, derived from Eratosthenes, Orion once boasted that he would kill every beast on the earth while he was hunting on Crete with Artemis and Leto, arousing such anger in Gaia (Earth) that she sent forth a huge scorpion, which stung him and so caused his death. Zeus set him among the stars afterwards at the request of his divine hunting companions, placing the scorpion in an adjoining region of the sky to commemorate the episode.¹³⁵

Or, according to Aratus, the author of a poem on the phenomena of the sky, Orion angered Artemis by seizing her by her robe while he was clearing Chios of its wild beasts, provoking her to cause some the neighbouring hills to break open send out a scorpion to attack him.¹³⁶

Since there was a previous tradition, as mentioned above, in which Artemis was said to have shot Orion for trying to rape her, this account by Aratus, which was apparently not of his own invention, can be regarded as being a hybrid version. There is also a variant in which Orion angered Artemis by disparaging her hunting skills, provoking her to ask Gaia to send the scorpion against him;¹³⁷ or in the very odd version in Ovid's *Fasti*, Gaia sent the scorpion against Leto for some unstated reason, and Orion was killed by it when he stepped in its path to protect the goddess.¹³⁸

And finally Istros, a pupil of Callimachus, devised a deliberately perverse account of Orion's death in which Artemis, who was an uncompromising virgin in her normal mythology, fell in love with Orion and agreed to marry him. Her brother Apollo was thoroughly dismayed, but she paid no heed to his objections; so one day, when he saw the head of Orion bobbing in the waves as he was swimming far out at sea, he bet his sister that she would be unable to hit the distant speck with one of her arrows. Since she valued nothing more highly than her reputation as an archer, she rose to the challenge and shot an arrow straight through Orion's head without realizing what it was. When his body was subsequently washed ashore, she was grief-stricken and transferred her dead suitor to the stars.¹³⁹

Myths of the Pleiades

If the constellation of Orion was perhaps the most splendid of all constellations, the star-cluster of the PLEIADES, set on the back of the constellation of the Bull, is assuredly the most striking and easily recognizable of all star-clusters, and it was used for calendrical purposes in Greece from an early period. In ancient and modern folklore alike, the stars in clusters of this kind tend to be identified either as maidens or as animals of one kind or another. Both ideas came to be applied to the present cluster in the classical world, for while the Romans called these stars the Septentriones, that is to say, the Seven Plough-oxen, the Greeks preferred to believe that they are maidens, and identified them with the seven daughters of Atlas, an idea that can already be found in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.¹⁴⁰ When this identification was made, the ancient name of the star-cluster came to be applied to the daughters of Atlas as a collective title; and the name traditionally ascribed to their mother, Pleione, was also secondary to that of the star-cluster, for it was evidently devised to enable the name of the Pleiades to be interpreted as a matronymic.

The daughters of Atlas were assigned different roles in myth, not always reconcilable, depending on whether they were viewed collectively as a group of maidens in relation to the star-cluster, or as individuals who founded various branches of one of the great families of heroic mythology, that of the Atlantids (see p. 440). We will consider them here in their former nature, in so far as they figure in astral mythology. Their astral myths fall into two categories, some explaining how the seven came to be transferred as a group to the heavens to become the star-cluster, and others explaining why one of the Pleiades shines less brightly than the others.

Their main myths of the former kind bring them into connection with Orion. For since the Pleiades are located in the same region of the sky as the constellation Orion, and set ahead of it, passing below the horizon as Orion rises, it could be imagined that Orion is pursuing them through the sky, just as he himself is pursued by the scorpion. It was thus said that Orion had once encountered them during their earthly life while they were passing through his native Boeotia with his mother Pleione, and had pursued them all with the intention of raping their mother; but when the chase had continued for five (or seven) years, Zeus took pity on the maidens and transferred them to the heavens, where the never-ending pursuit can now be seen to be represented among the stars.¹⁴¹ Or else it was they themselves who aroused the lust of Orion, and they appealed to Zeus to remove them to the stars when they came under pursuit from him, because they wanted to retain their virginity and hunt with Artemis (which conflicts of course with their other role as mothers of families).¹⁴²

Even if Orion was generally thought to have provoked their removal to the sky, other stories were also put forward. One such story provided a joint explanation for the origin of the Pleiades and of the Hyades, another star-cluster in the Bull made up of five stars that outline the bull's face. It is suggested in this connection that the Pleiades were not the only children of Atlas, but were members of a larger family along with five other sisters and a brother called HYAS. When Hyas was killed by a

lion (or snake, or boar) during a hunting trip in Libya, five of his sisters were so overwhelmed by their grief that they soon died of a broken heart, arousing the pity of Zeus, who placed them in the sky as the Hyades; and when the seven remaining sisters also died after a lapse of time, Zeus transferred them to the same region of the sky as the Pleiades. The Hyades were named after their brother because they had shown the greatest grief for him, and the other sisters were called the Pleiades because there were more (*pleious*) of them!¹⁴³ Or, according to an account offered by the Hellenistic poet Moiro, which is based on a trick of language, the Pleiades had been doves (*peleiades*) during their earthly life, and had brought ambrosia from the streams of Ocean to the infant Zeus, who had later rewarded them by placing them in the sky.¹⁴⁴ Stories like this could be made up almost at will.

Although convention stated that there were seven stars in the Pleiades, this was a somewhat arbitrary number, because more stars can be distinguished and six are brighter than all the rest. To explain why one of the seven stars should be less radiant, authors appealed to the individual destinies that were ascribed to the sisters in their role as the founders of families. Perhaps the Pleiad Merope hides her light because she is ashamed at having been the only one who had married a mortal, namely Sisyphos (see p. 441), while all her sisters had borne children to gods.¹⁴⁵ Or else another of the sisters, Electra, was so distressed to behold the destruction of Troy (which was ruled by descendants of hers, see below, pp. 441ff.) that she covered her face and has been barely visible ever since; or else she abandoned her sisters altogether to become a comet, an idea inspired by the thought that the tail of a comet (i.e. long-haired star, *astēr komētēs*) resembles the loosened hair of a woman in mourning.¹⁴⁶

The fate of Narcissos

NARCISSOS was a young man who lived in the Boeotian town of Thespiiai. He was a son of Cephisos, the god of a local river, who had fathered him by a nymph called Leiriope, and he was so beautiful that he fell in love with himself on seeing his features reflected in a spring on Mt Helicon; unable to tear himself away, he finally died of love beside the waters of the spring, which was known ever afterwards as the Spring of Narcissos. In reporting this story from the local tradition, Pausanias remarks that it is a thoroughly stupid tale, and so provides a rationalized version, no less foolish in its way, in which Narcissos had a twin sister who looked exactly like himself; he greatly loved this sister and consoled himself after her death by gazing at his reflection in the spring, imagining that it was her reflection even though he was fully aware that it was not.¹⁴⁷

In the most familiar account of his story by Ovid, his story is brought into connection with that of the nymph Echo, who was otherwise said to have been reduced to a mere voice because she rejected the advances of Pan (see p. 200). In Ovid's tale she incurred that fate by angering Hera. For to save her fellow nymphs from being caught by Hera while they were dallying with Zeus, Echo used to distract the goddess with a constant flow of talk until they could get safely away. When Hera came to realize that she had been tricked in this fashion, she punished the nymph by

greatly reducing her powers of speech, so that she could no longer utter any thought of her own, but merely repeat the last words that she had heard from others. While subject to this handicap, she fell in love with Narcissos and followed him around in secret until she could contrive a meeting. He fled from her approach, however, when she tried to embrace him, since he was cold by nature, and she then wasted away in solitary grief until nothing was left of her apart from her bones and voice, and finally her re-echoing voice alone after her bones turned to stone. When Narcissos had rejected many admirers in this way, nymphs and youths alike, a scorned youth prayed that he should suffer an unrequited passion in his turn. So one day, as he was leaning over a woodland pool to drink, he fell in love with his own reflection and remained forever at that spot, unable to tear himself away, until he died from exhaustion and unsatisfied desire. His hopeless passion was witnessed by Echo, who re-echoed his sighs and laments. Even in the Underworld, so Ovid tells us, he continues to stare at his reflection in the Styx. He was mourned by the woodland nymphs in the world above, but when his body was due to be cremated, it was nowhere to be seen, and a narcissus flower was found to have grown up in place of it.¹⁴⁸

To combine the stories of Echo and Narcissos may well have been an idea introduced by Ovid himself. A better idea of the original Greek legend of Narcissos may be gained from the account offered by the mythographer Conon, who was writing at much the same time as Ovid. A certain Ameinias took his own life after being spurned by Narcissos, and prayed to Nemesis (Retribution personified, see p. 61) to avenge him. Narcissos came to fall deeply in love with himself as a consequence on seeing his beauty reflected in a stream; and coming to feel that he had deserved this fate for having humiliated Ameinias, he finally killed himself, and the narcissus flower then sprang from his blood.¹⁴⁹ Much the same story is recounted very succinctly in some lines discovered on a papyrus, which are ascribed to Parthenios, a poet of the first century BC. Narcissus had a cruel heart, so we are told and hated all his (male) admirers, until he came to conceive a love for his own form. He wept for his beauty on seeing his face reflected, as delightful as a dream, within a spring, and killed himself, shedding his blood on the earth (evidently to give rise to the flower that bore his name).¹⁵⁰

Orpheus and Harpalyce, two notable Thracians

Although not strictly a part of Greece, the land of Thrace, on the northern shores of the Aegean, was of some importance in Greek myth as the home of a variety of gods and heroes who were mostly of a violent disposition; the war-god Ares had his home there, as did Boreas, the wild North Wind, and such heroes as Lycourgos, who persecuted the young Dionysos and his nurses (see p. 165), and Diomedes, who fed his horses on human flesh (see p. 249), and Tereus, who raped his sister-in-law and cut out her tongue (see p. 322–3). Some Thracians were remembered for something other than their brutality, however, such as Rhesos, a colourful but short-lived ally of the Trojans (see p. 475), and the musician Thamyras (see p. 192), and the mythical singer ORPHEUS, who remains to be discussed.

Although theogonies (see p. 20) and other writings on religious matters came to be ascribed to Orpheus, and he thus came to be associated with distinctive ‘Orphic’ teachings, we are concerned with him simply as a mythical hero who lived a generation before the Trojan War and met an early death after trying to rescue his wife Eurydice from the Underworld. As befitted a mythical musician, he was usually said to have been a son of one of the Muses, generally Calliope, who bore him either to Apollo or to a Thracian ruler called Oïagros.¹⁵¹ He was learned in all kinds of wisdom, including magic, but was famed above all as a wonderful singer and musician, so wonderful that the birds and beasts, and even inanimate rocks and trees, would follow him in enchantment as he sang to his lyre, and rivers would halt in their courses at the sound of his melodies. The power that he exercised over animals is first mentioned by Simonides, who states that birds would hover overhead and fishes leap clear out of the water in response to his music.¹⁵² His instrument was the lyre (*kithara* or *phorminx*), Apollo’s chosen vehicle, and it was sometimes said that Apollo himself gave him his lyre or taught him his musical skills.¹⁵³ While sailing with Jason and the Argonauts, he saved his comrades from death by out-singing the Sirens (see p. 409).

Orpheus fell in love with a dryad nymph called EURYDICE and took her as his wife, but their union was destined to be brief because she soon died from a snakebite. According to Vergil, this came about when the rustic deity Aristaios tried to rape her and she trod on a poisonous snake as she was fleeing from him (see p. 147); or, in Ovid’s account, the accident occurred while she was roaming the meadows with her fellow nymphs shortly after her wedding, which had been attended by sinister omens. Orpheus was grief-stricken in any case, and resolved to make his way down into the Underworld in the hope of recovering her. He turned his gifts as a singer to good advantage during this perilous enterprise, exploiting it to charm Cerberos into allowing him into the world of the dead and then to soften the heart of grim Hades himself. The Roman poets embroider on this theme at will, suggesting that the shades of the dead were entranced by his singing, and that those who were subjected to everlasting punishment below were moved to pause for a while from their futile labours, and that the vultures stopped pecking at the liver of Tantalos, and that Ixion’s wheel stopped in its flight, and that the pitiless Furies wept for the first time in their lives. It was perhaps because of the thrill of his music that Hades and Persephone allowed him to lead his wife out of the land of the dead, laying down only a single condition, that he should never look back at her until he arrived in the world above. As they were approaching the light of day, however, he was unable to restrain himself from looking back to check that Eurydice was following him, and she disappeared at that instant and was lost to him forever.¹⁵⁴

Although some version of this story that was known to Euripides, and probably to Aeschylus too,¹⁵⁵ we have to wait until the Roman period for any full account of it, and indeed for the first mention of the idea that Orpheus was told not to look round to see if his wife was following him. Moschus, a bucolic poet of the second century BC, is the first author to report that she was called Eurydice.¹⁵⁶ In view of the lack of early evidence, it is difficult to tell whether this tale, which has become one of the most famous of all Greek myths, was of any great antiquity. The Orpheus relief at

Naples, a Roman replica of a Greek work from the fifth century BC, which shows Eurydice between Hermes and Orpheus, could be interpreted as showing Hermes taking her hand to lead her back below as she bids farewell to her husband, but there is otherwise no sign of the story in the visual arts until the Hellenistic period (even if the death of Orpheus, which is not necessarily connected with the fate of Eurydice, is shown in fifth century vase-paintings).

In his despondency at having lost all hope of recovering his wife, Orpheus withdrew into an embittered solitude and shunned the company of women; or he even came to hate the entire female sex. In the account of his death that has become familiar through Ovid and Vergil, the women of Thrace took offence at his scorn and attacked him when they caught sight of him one day while they were roaming the hills as Bacchantes; under the influence of their religious frenzy, they assaulted him ever more violently and finally tore him to pieces.¹⁵⁷ Or, in a rather different version, he provoked the women to this extreme action by redirecting his affections from women to men, and so introducing homosexuality into the land for the first time. It is reported in this connection that he engaged in a love affair with Calais, one of the twin sons of Boreas (the North Wind, whose home lay in Thrace, see p. 46); since Calais had sailed with Orpheus as an Argonaut and was a Thracian like himself, he was an obvious candidate for this role.¹⁵⁸

In some other accounts of the killing of Orpheus, the women of Thrace came to resent him for reasons that were unconnected with his reaction to the loss of Eurydice, either because he had refused to admit women into mystery cults that he had founded, or because he had drawn their menfolk away from them through the enchantment of his music.¹⁵⁹ The earliest known account is one that is supposed to have been offered in the lost *Bassarids* of Aeschylus (if it is indeed the case that the whole of the following narrative was derived from that play). Our report states, rather mysteriously, that Orpheus ceased to honour Dionysos after his visit to the Underworld because of what he had seen there, and came to honour the sun-god Helios instead as the greatest of the gods, equating him with Apollo. He used to climb Pangaion, a lofty mountain in southern Thrace, before sunrise every morning to ensure that he would always be the first to behold the object of his worship. Dionysos grew so angry at his behaviour, however, that he caused his death by sending the *Bassarids* (i.e. Maenads, Bacchantes) against him.¹⁶⁰ There are other versions too in which Zeus struck him with a thunderbolt because he had been revealing divine secrets in the mysteries that he had founded, or Aphrodite incited the women against him because his mother Calliope had judged that Adonis, a young favourite of the goddess, should spend half the year away from her with Persephone.¹⁶¹

Any number of picturesque details and additional stories came to be attached to this legend of the death of Orpheus. Just as the whole of nature had been moved by Orpheus' music during his lifetime, the whole of nature, animate and inanimate alike, sorrowed for him at his death; the local nymphs wept for him, the trees shed their leaves, the rivers swelled with their own tears, and even the flinty rocks wept at his passing.¹⁶² The husbands of the Thracian women were so angered by their murder of Orpheus that they inflicted pin-wounds on them as a punishment and sign

of infamy, so initiating the custom in Thrace by which women were tattooed.¹⁶³ The head of Orpheus, which was flung into the river Hebros, floated out to sea and was eventually washed ashore on Lesbos, an island renowned for its lyric poets.¹⁶⁴ His lyre too drifted to Lesbos and was buried on the shore with his body, or was dedicated in a temple of Apollo;¹⁶⁵ or else it was transferred to the heavens by the Muses, or by Zeus at the request of the Muses, to become the constellation of the Lyre.¹⁶⁶

Another Thracian who is worthy of mention is the Amazonian heroine HARPALYCE. Vergil, whose portrait of Camilla seems to have been partially inspired by her legend, refers to her in the *Aeneid* as a Thracian who could outrun horses and even the swift-flowing Hebros, the greatest river in Thrace.¹⁶⁷ She was the daughter of a local ruler called Harpalycos, who suckled her at the teats of cows and mares after the death of her mother, and later trained her in the arts of war in the hope of making her his successor. While travelling home to Greece after the Trojan War, Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles, attacked the kingdom and inflicted a grave wound on Harpalycos in the course of the fighting; but the king was saved by his martial daughter, who launched a counter-attack and put the enemy to flight. Or, according to another tale of the kind, she raised a force to rescue her aged father after he was seized by the Getai, a fierce people of northern Thrace. In the end, however, his plans for his daughter came to nothing, since he was killed by his subjects in a revolt and Harpalyce withdrew to the woods in sorrow. She then supported herself by cattle-raiding until some herdsmen attacked her in her woodland lair and killed her.¹⁶⁸

Some legends of Aegean islands

The Greek islands also had their local legends, some very picturesque, as in the case of the stories that were told about the priest-king Anios and his wonder-working daughters on Delos (see p. 461). Here are a few memorable stories from other islands. We may begin with stories associated with the island of Ceos, lying to the south-east of the tip of Attica. ACONTIOS, a young Cean from a respectable but relatively poor family, fell in love with CYDIPPE, a Naxian or Athenian of higher birth, when he happened to meet her at a festival on Delos. After following her to the temple of Artemis, he threw an apple down in front of her inscribed with the words, 'I swear by Artemis to marry none other than Acontios', and she picked it up and innocently read the message, speaking the words aloud as readers commonly did in ancient times, and so bound herself to Acontios by a solemn oath. When her father subsequently tried to marry her to a man of his own choice, she fell prey to a mysterious illness and he was obliged to postpone the marriage; and after being forced to do so on two further occasions, he sought the advice of the Delphic oracle, which revealed that Artemis was making his daughter ill to prevent her from breaking her oath. So he agreed that she should marry Acontios, whose scheme was thus brought to fulfilment. This story was recounted in a lost poem by Callimachus, but is now most familiar from Ovid's account.¹⁶⁹

Ceos is also the location of the story of CYPARISSOS, at least in the best-known

account of it by Ovid. Cyparissos was a young favourite of Apollo who was turned into a cypress- tree in the following circumstances. A tame stag lived on the island at this time, a splendid beast, which was sacred to the nymphs and wholly lacking in fear; and although it was friendly to everyone, Cyparissos was especially fond of it and used to lead it to new pastures and refreshing springs, and would wreath its horns with garlands and even ride on its back, guiding it with scarlet reins. One day, however, while it was resting under the shade of some trees in the midday heat, Cyparissos happened to throw his hunting-spear in that direction and accidentally killed it. In the intensity of his grief, he resolved to join it in death, even though Apollo urged him to show a proper sense of proportion. As he was wasting away in his sorrow, he prayed to the gods to be allowed to mourn forever, and was transformed into a cypress, a tree associated with mourning and graveyards.¹⁷⁰ In another account, Cyparissos was a young Cretan who fled from his homeland to escape the advances of Apollo (or Zephyros), and was transformed into a cypress tree on Mt Casion in Syria. This version of his story, which was presumably of Hellenistic origin, seems to have been modelled on the famous legend of Apollo and Daphne (see p. 148), which is also set in Syria in one version.¹⁷¹

Stony Seriphos further to the south was famous in myth for its association with Perseus (see pp. 225ff.), while Thera, on the southern bounds of the archipelago of the Cyclades, was said to have grown from a clod of earth that was thrown into the sea by an Argonaut (see p. 411), to have been settled by followers of Cadmos (see p. 332), and later ruled by a descendant of his, Theras (see p. 283).

To pass across to the Eastern Sporades off the west coast of Asia Minor, the island of Cos received a famous visit from Heracles while he was sailing home after sacking Troy (see p. 262). It was ruled in the very earliest times by an earthborn king called MEROPS, who was finally transformed into an eagle. In the version recounted in the astronomical literature, this came about after Artemis caused him to lose his much-loved wife, the nymph Echemeia (or Ethemeia), who had offended the goddess by ceasing to honour her, and who was shot by her as a consequence. Perhaps she had been a devotee of Artemis and had angered her by abandoning her virginity to marry the king. The goddess would have killed her with her arrows in any case if Persephone had not intervened, for some unknown reason, and had removed her to the Underworld while she was still alive. Merops missed her so greatly that he wanted to kill himself, but Hera (presumably as the goddess who presided over married love) took pity on him and transferred him to the heavens, turning him into an eagle before doing so, to ensure that he would not retain his human memory and so continue to grieve for his wife. He can be seen in the sky to this day as the constellation of the Eagle (Aquila).¹⁷² In what may have been the original version of the story before it was turned into a constellation myth, the goddess Rhea, who had formerly been received by Merops as a guest, took pity on him in the aforementioned circumstances and transformed him into an earthly eagle, which became the special bird of Zeus.¹⁷³ It is not clear in either case why he should have been turned into an eagle specifically. Since his name means bee-eater in Greek, that may perhaps have initially prompted the development of a transformation myth in which he was transformed into that bird rather than into an eagle. Merops was the eponym of the

Meropes, the primordial inhabitants of the island; it is said that the island was named Meropia until Merops renamed it after his daughter Cos.¹⁷⁴ There was an early epic entitled the *Meropis*, but nothing is known of its contents.

The island of Samos further up the coast had a memorable hero in ANCAIOS, who not only sailed with the Argonauts like his Arcadian namesake (see p. 548), but was also killed by a boar just as he was. He was borne to Zeus or Poseidon by Astypalaia, the eponym of an island of that name to the west of Cos), and ruled over the Leleges, the aboriginal inhabitants of Samos. He was skilled in the arts of seamanship, as befits an islander, and volunteered to become the steersman of the *Argo* after the original helmsman, Tiphys, died on the outward journey (see p. 404). When he arrived home from after the voyage, he turned his attention to agriculture and planted many vines, but was warned by a seer that he would meet his death before he could drink from their fruit. Since all seemed well with him when the crop was ripe, he pressed some grapes and summoned the seer to rebuke him for his incompetence. 'I'm still alive', he said, 'and the fruit is ripe, and I'm just about to drink; look, you can see the wine in the cup'. In no way disconcerted, the seer replied, 'There's many a slip between the cup and the lip'; and at that very moment, a man ran up to warn Ancaios that a wild boar was ravaging his vineyard. So he put the cup aside to confront the beast, and was killed by it before he could raise the cup to his lips.¹⁷⁵ Hence the famous proverb, which was transmitted into English through the Latin version in Erasmus' anthology of ancient adages.

PHAON was a ferryman who lived at Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, further north again, and had a fortunate, or perhaps not so fortunate, encounter with Aphrodite. When the goddess appeared to him one day in the guise of an old woman, he showed her every consideration and ferried her across to the mainland without demanding a fee; and she rewarded by giving him an alabaster pot containing a marvellous ointment, which made him young and handsome when he rubbed it into his skin. The women of Mytilene found him irresistible as a consequence, ultimately to his own detriment because he was eventually caught in adultery and killed.¹⁷⁶ His story was a favourite subject in Attic comedy of the fourth century BC. A fragment from Menander refers to a strange story in which Sappho, the great poetess of the island, was said to have fallen hopelessly in love with him, and so to have become the first woman to hurl herself down from the Leucadian rock, a celebrated lover's leap on the island of Leucas far way in the Ionian Sea.¹⁷⁷ The idea was presumably inspired by something that Sappho said in her poems, but nothing relevant can be found in what remains of them. In a play by Cratinos, another author of comedies, Phaon seems to have been portrayed in a similar role to that of Adonis, for Aphrodite herself apparently fell in love with him and hid him away in a lettuce-bed.¹⁷⁸

Cinyras, Pygmalion, and the legends of Cyprus

Cyprus attracted settlers from Greece and the Levant alike from the late Bronze Age onwards, and it was thus significant as a point of contact between Greek and Near Eastern culture. It was a principal centre for the cult of Aphrodite, hence the goddess's title of the Cyprian (Cypris, or Cypria). The most notable Cypriot in Greek

heroic legend was CINYRAS, the mythical founder of the cult of Aphrodite-Astarte at Paphos on the west coast of the island (where the goddess was supposed to have come ashore after she was born among the waves). Cinyras originated as the eponym and mythical ancestor of the clan of priests who presided over this cult, the Cinyridai, whose name was derived from a Semitic expression meaning 'sons of the lyre'. He is first mentioned in the *Iliad*, which reports that he sent a magnificent breastplate to Agamemnon as a gift of friendship after he learned that the Greeks were mounting an expedition against Troy; this was an elaborate piece of metalwork of Near Eastern design, ornamented with ten bands of dark blue enamel (*kyanos*), and twelve of gold, and twenty of tin, and with enamelled snakes reaching up to the neck, three on each side.¹⁷⁹ Later authors elaborate on this Homeric story by suggesting that the Greeks tried to enlist Cinyras as an ally. According to Apollodorus, Menelaos visited him on Cyprus for that purpose in the company of Odysseus and the herald Talthybios, and met with apparent success, for Cinyras not only presented the breastplate as a gift for Agamemnon but promised to send a large force of troops in fifty ships; but when the time came for him to fulfil his oath, he did so in a purely formal fashion by sending one proper ship out to sea along with forty-nine ships modelled from clay, crewed with men of clay, which soon foundered in the waves.¹⁸⁰ Or, in another account, Palamedes was sent to enlist the aid of Cinyras, but secretly advised him to have nothing to do with the war; so although Palamedes announced on his return that Cinyras would send a hundred ships, none ever appeared.¹⁸¹

There was no settled tradition on the birth and origin of Cinyras. He was born on Cyprus in some accounts, usually as a son of Paphos, the eponym of the Cypriot city of that name; or else he was born in Cilicia, the province of Asia Minor facing Cyprus to the north, as a son of Sandacos (a descendant of Cephalos and Eos), and emigrated to Cyprus with a group of followers to found the city of Paphos.¹⁸² He married a certain Cenchreis, who bore him a notable daughter, Myrrha (or Smyrna); for the story of how Myrrha (who was of different parentage in some accounts) deceived her father into sleeping with her and conceived Adonis to him, see p. 183.¹⁸³ Or else he married Metharme, daughter of Pygmalion, and fathered Adonis by her as a legitimate child along with various other children.¹⁸⁴ Cinyras killed himself in one account after discovering that he had slept with his own daughter; or else he reigned in prosperity to an extraordinary age; or he was put to death by Apollo after being defeated by him in a musical contest.¹⁸⁵ It was said in connection with this last story that his daughters threw themselves into the sea in sorrow at his death and were turned into halcyons (a mythical bird, see p. 380).¹⁸⁶ According to another tale, which presumably alludes to the temple-prostitution that was practised in connection with the cult of Aphrodite-Astarte, Aphrodite forced them to sleep with strangers as a punishment after they had offended her in some unspecified manner.¹⁸⁷ Ovid records a comparable tale in which some Cypriot women called the Propoitides denied the divinity of Aphrodite, so angering her that she caused them to become the first women to lose their good name by prostituting themselves in public.¹⁸⁸

Few stories from classical myth are more familiar than that of PYGMALION, the

king of Cyprus who fell in love with a statue that he himself had made. Ovid is our sole source, however, for the version that has become canonic in modern times, in which the statue is brought to life. After having lived unmarried and without a partner for many years, so the poet recounts, because he was repelled by the loose morals of the women around him (the shameless Propoetides mentioned above), Pygmalion set to work to create an ivory woman of ideal beauty, and then proceeded to fall in love with his own creation. He kissed and embraced it, presented gifts to it as though it were alive, adorned it with robes and fine jewellery, and laid it out on a couch strewn with purple cloth; and when the day arrived for the feast of Aphrodite, he offered rich sacrifices to the goddess and prayed to be granted a wife like the ivory maiden, not quite daring to say that the statue itself was the object of his desire. But the goddess divined his hidden thoughts and brought the statue to life, and he then married her at a wedding attended by the goddess, and fathered a daughter Paphos, the future mother of Cinyras, by his newly created wife.¹⁸⁹ Although Pygmalion's wife is left unnamed in Ovid's account, she has been known as Galatea since the eighteenth century, in accordance with the name that was conferred on her by Rousseau in his melodrama *Pygmalion*.

We have summaries of an earlier account of Pygmalion's legend ascribed to Philotephanos, and author of the third century BC, in which Pygmalion fell in love with an ivory image of Aphrodite, and treated it much as if it were alive, taking it to bed and embracing it.¹⁹⁰ This version, in which the statue is not brought to life, bears a close resemblance to the story of Laodameia, who was said to have consorted with a statue of her dead husband after he was killed at the beginning of the Trojan War (see p. 466).

Three love stories from Asia Minor and beyond

HERO and LEANDER (properly Leandros in Greek) were two ill-starred lovers who lived on either side of the narrow straits of the Hellespont (Dardanelles). Leander, who lived at Abydos on the Asian shore, fell in love with Hero, a young priestess of Aphrodite, after meeting her at a festival of the goddess in her home town of Sestos on the opposite shore. He used to swim across the straits at night to visit her in secret, guided on his way by a lamp that she shone from her tower by the shore; but one night, when he rashly attempted to make the crossing even though a fierce storm was blowing, Hero's guiding flame was extinguished by the wind, and he soon lost his bearings and was swept to his death by the dangerous current. When Hero looked down from her tower on the following morning and saw his corpse at the water's edge, she hurled herself down so as to be united with him in death. This legend, which was apparently of Hellenistic origin, first appears in Vergil and Ovid and is recounted in full in an epyllion (miniature epic) by Musaeus, probably dating to the fifth century AD.¹⁹¹ It has remained popular ever since; the Elizabethan rendering by Marlowe and Chapman is finer than any version that has survived from the ancient world.

The legend of PHILEMON and BAUCIS, which is also set in Asia Minor and was apparently based on Phrygian traditions, is a love-story too in its very different way.

As Zeus and Hermes were once travelling through Phrygia in human disguise and looking for somewhere to rest, they were turned away from countless homes until Philemon and Baucis, a poor and aged peasant couple, welcomed them into their lowly cottage. As the pair were providing their guests with such food and drink as their means allowed, they noticed that the mixing-bowl that they were using for the wine filled itself of its own accord as often as it was drained, and inferred from this that their visitors must be gods. Although they were then eager to kill their only goose in honour of their divine guests, the two gods prevented them and told them that they were planning to punish the people all around, but that the old pair would escape if they climbed to the top of the mountain that rose up behind their cottage. On reaching the top, the couple looked back and saw that the gods had flooded the countryside below to punish the local people for their hard-heartedness, leaving only their own cottage unaffected. As they watched in amazement, their cottage was then transformed into a splendid temple with a floor and columns of marble and a roof of gold. When the gods promised to grant them whatever they most desired, they asked to serve as their priest and priestess in the newly created temple, and to die at the same instant so that neither would be left alone. After a long and happy old age, they died together as they had asked, and were transformed into two trees, an oak and a lime, which grew from a single trunk.¹⁹² Goethe was greatly struck by this story and adapted it to his own purposes in the final book of his *Faust*.

The ill-starred lovers PYRAMOS and THISBE appear in two legends of a very different nature. The less familiar sources connect them with a river and a spring, the river Pyramos, which flowed to the sea in Cilicia in the south-eastern corner of Asia Minor, and the spring of Thisbe, which issued into the sea nearby (or perhaps into the mouth of the river itself). Long ago, so it was said, there had been two lovers called Pyramos and Thisbe whose passion had ended in tragedy, for Thisbe had committed suicide after becoming pregnant and Pyramos had followed her example after learning of her fate; but the gods had taken pity on them and had transformed them into the above-mentioned river and spring, to enable them to associate intimately in their new form by mingling their waters (just as Alpheios was supposed to mingle his waters with those of Arethousa, see p. 40).¹⁹³

Ovid's Babylonian love-tragedy of Pyramos and Thisbe, which is acted out by Peter Quince and his company in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, follows quite another course. Although the names of the lovers must have been transferred from one story to the other, it is by no means easy to tell which was the older. One might be tempted to suspect that the preceding story was the earlier, having originated as a Hellenistic aetiological myth, but it is known only from late sources, all later than Ovid, and it seems to have been modelled moreover on the famous myth of Alpheios and Arethousa. Ovid's hero and heroine lived further to the east, having grown up in adjoining houses in Babylon. When their youthful passion turned to love and they sought to marry, their parents ordered them to stop associating with one another, and they were reduced to communicating through a chink in the wall that separated their two houses. They finally arranged to steal away at night to meet outside the city by the tomb of a certain Ninus, where they could lie beneath a mulberry tree that stood beside a cool spring. Thisbe arrived first but was soon scared away when a

lioness came down to the spring to quench its thirst after a kill. The veil that she had been wearing to conceal her features slipped from her shoulders as she fled; and the lion caught sight of it on the ground and ripped it to pieces with its blood-stained jaws. When Pyramos arrived and saw the bloodied fabric lying there with the lion's footprints all around, he naturally assumed that his beloved had been devoured and killed himself with his sword. Thisbe returned as soon as she dared for fear of disappointing her lover, but found him dead on the ground and killed herself in her turn. After Pyramos had stabbed himself and pulled the sword from his wound, a stream of blood had gushed out to spatter the fruit on the mulberry-tree above and to sink into its roots, causing the fruit (which had formerly been white) to turn red; and in response to Thisbe's dying prayer, the gods ordained that the ripe fruit of the mulberry should always be a mournful red in commemoration of the lovers' fate.¹⁹⁴

Strange folk in far places

Strange, distorted, and monstrous folk were reputed to live at the fringes of the known world. The elder Pliny (first century AD) provides a useful catalogue of these monstrous races,¹⁹⁵ which later found their way into mediaeval lore; the majority of them, and certainly the most imaginative, had been introduced into the Greek tradition by Ctesias and authors of the Hellenistic period, who compiled fanciful accounts of the marvels of the east. Ctesias of Cnidos worked as a physician at the Persian court at the end of the fifth century BC and wrote a book called *Indica* on his return, which was full of tall tales and helped to establish the enduring notion that India was a land of wonders. Among the people who were described in the book were the Dogheads (Kynokephaloi, or Cynocephali in Latin form), people with dog's heads who lived in the mountains of India and communicated by barking rather than through articulate speech; and the Shadefeet (Sciapodes), who could hop along quite briskly on their single leg when necessity demanded, but preferred to spend their time lying on their backs using their single large foot as a parasol; and another race of people had ears that reached down to their shoulders, and were born with white hair that turned dark with age. These latter people reappear in exaggerated form in the medieval tradition as the Panotii (All-ears), people whose ears were so large that they could use them as blankets.

If monstrous races such as these were of comparatively late invention, others of a less extreme nature, the Pygmies and Arimaspians, can be traced back to the archaic era. The diminutive PYGMIES (Pygmaioi) lived somewhere in Africa. Their small stature is indicated in their name, which refers to a Greek unit of measurement, the *pygmē* (fist), corresponding to the distance between a man's elbow and knuckles. They are first mentioned in a simile in the *Iliad*, in which the cries of advancing Trojan warriors are compared to those uttered by cranes as they set off to escape the winter 'and fly with much clamour to the Ocean's streams, bringing death and slaughter to the Pygmy men'.¹⁹⁶ Whether this idea of battles between the cranes and Pygmies (who would have been of much the same size) was drawn from current folklore or was simply a passing fancy of Homer's, it certainly became a central and enduring feature of Pygmy lore. In vase-paintings and other images from the sixth

century BC onwards, the Pygmies are often shown fighting against the cranes with clubs, lances, and other weapons, or riding against them on goats or rams. They are usually portrayed in a comical manner as plump little figures with outsized genitals. A transformation myth was devised in Hellenistic times to account for the feud between the Pygmies and the cranes. It was explained that there had once been a Pygmy woman called Oinoe (or Gerana) who had failed to honour Artemis and Hera and had therefore been turned into a crane by way of punishment; and when she had then irritated the Pygmies by constantly fluttering around their town because she yearned to see her infant son Mopsos, they had taken up their clubs to drive her out, hence the state of war that has existed between the cranes and Pygmies ever since.¹⁹⁷

Most authors from Herodotus onwards regarded the Pygmies as an African people;¹⁹⁸ whether reports about the real people who have come to be known by that name ever reached the Greeks by way of Egypt is now impossible to tell. In the only other myth recorded for them, the Pygmies make a none too serious entry into heroic mythology as adversaries of Heracles, who tangled with them as he was travelling through North Africa on his way to the Hesperides. When he sank into an exhausted sleep after his wrestling match with Antaios (see p. 256), the Pygmies tried to tie him down, much as the Lilliputians did with Gulliver but with less success, for Heracles released himself with no great difficulty and bundled the little men into his lion-skin to take them home to Greece as a curiosity.¹⁹⁹

The one-eyed ARIMASPIANS lived on the opposite side of the world in the far north. They too engaged in regular hostilities with some animal neighbours, in this case the fabulous GRIFFINS (*grypes*), monsters of Near Eastern design with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. The trouble arose because the Arimaspians were constantly trying to steal from large hoards of gold that were jealously guarded by the Griffins. This story was related in an early hexameter poem, the *Arimaspea*, probably dating to the seventh century BC, which told how its reputed author, Aristeas of Proconnesos, was supposed to have travelled to the far north while possessed by Apollo. He eventually found himself among the Issedones, who lived quite close to the Hyperboreans (a mythical people who lived at the northern edges of the earth, see p. 142); and it was from these Issedones that he learned about the Arimaspians and Griffins, who inhabited the stretch of land that lay between his hosts and the Hyperboreans. Although Herodotus was only too happy to report the story (along with many other ethnographic curiosities), he was inclined to believe that the Arimaspians really had two eyes just like everyone else.²⁰⁰

Arion and the dolphin; Phalanthos and Aithra, two ghost stories from Greek colonies in Italy

Many of the Greek cities of Italy and Sicily grew wealthy and were able to support a flourishing cultural life. Among the artists and writers who sought to benefit from their patronage was ARION of Methymna, a lyric poet of the seventh century BC, who was born on Lesbos but spent most of his life at the court of Periander (Periandros in Greek), the ruthless but cultivated tyrant of Corinth. At one time, so

the story goes, Arion made a tour of Sicily and Italy, amassing a considerable profit from his recitations, until he finally set off for Greece in a Corinthian ship that was sailing out of Tarentum. When it reached the open sea, he came to realize that the sailors were plotting to throw him overboard in order to steal his money. After vainly entreating them to accept his money in return for his life, he asked to be allowed to give a final recital at the stern in his magnificent singing-robcs, saying that he would then take his own life by jumping into the sea. As soon as he landed in the water, however, he was rescued by a dolphin that had been attracted by the sound of his music; and it took him on its back and carried him to Greece, putting him ashore at Cape Tainaron at the southern tip of the Peloponnese. He hurried back to Corinth and told the whole story to Periander, who was reluctant to believe him until he could interrogate the crew of the ship. When they claimed on their arrival that they had left Arion safe and well at Tarentum, the poet suddenly revealed himself wearing the robes that he had donned for his farewell recital. Their lies were thus exposed in a most dramatic fashion, and Periander sentenced them to death. Such is the standard version of the story as recounted by Herodotus.²⁰¹ Later authors adapted it to explain the origin of the constellation of the Dolphin (Delphinus), saying that Apollo, the divine patron of poets, rewarded the dolphin for its rescue of Arion by transferring it to the stars.²⁰² Visitors to Tainaron could see a bronze statue of a man on a dolphin that had supposedly been dedicated there by Arion.²⁰³

Ancient writers have much to say about dolphins, which were known to be friendly to human beings and were reputed to be fond of music. Some dolphin stories were mythical like that of Arion, or one that was told about Enalos, one of the legendary first colonisers of Lesbos. When a girl whom he loved was due to be offered up to Amophitrite and the sea-nymphs at the order of an oracle, he clasped her in his arms and threw himself into the sea along with her, but he and his beloved were both carried to safety by dolphins.²⁰⁴ Other stories were based on fact, as in the case of Pliny's sad tale of the dolphin of Hippo Diarrhytus (an African coastal town not far from Carthage), which proved too friendly for its own good. For by allowing people to stroke it and feed it, and even to ride on its back, it attracted so many visitors to the town that the citizens, who were obliged to entertain visitors of high rank who came to see it, finally killed it because they could no longer afford the expense.²⁰⁵

The city of Tarentum on the heel of Italy, from which Arion set off on his eventful voyage, was founded at the end of the eighth century BC by some emigrants from Sparta known as the Partheniai, and a memorable legend came to be attached to the story of its founding. The Partheniai were led by a Spartan called PHALANTHOS, so it was claimed, who had received an oracle at Delphi before his departure telling him that he would win a land and city for himself when rain fell on him from a clear sky. Although he met with some success in battle after his arrival in Italy, he failed to capture any city or territory and grew increasingly despondent, suspecting that the god at Delphi had set an impossible condition for his success. One day, however, as he was lying with his head in his wife's lap to enable her to pick the lice from his hair, he felt her tears pattering down on him as she wept at the failure of his hopes; and since her name was Aithra (which means Clear Sky in Greek), he suddenly

realized that her tears must be the 'rain' that the oracle had referred to. So he returned to battle with renewed confidence, to such effect that he captured Tarentum from its native inhabitants on the very next night and founded a Greek city there.²⁰⁶

Our last two legends are in effect ghost stories, for both tell how people from the historical era were supposed to have come into contact, and violent contact too, with dead figures from the mythical past; the stories are connected with cities on either side of the toe of Italy, one with Epizephyrean Locri on its east coast and the other with Temesa on its west coast.

Believing that their colony had been founded from Naryx in Eastern Locris, which was the birthplace of the Locrian Ajax, a violent hero of the Trojan War (see p. 434), the men of Epizephyrean Locri used to leave an empty space in their battle-line in the hope that their ancestral hero would come to their assistance. One day (so the story goes), as they were fighting against an army from Croton, a city further up the coast, a Crotoniate called AUTOLEON (or Leonymos) tried to rush through the empty space to attack the enemy line from the rear (or indeed deliberately attacked at the point where he had heard that Ajax was supposed to be standing). He was severely wounded in the thigh (or chest) by the long-dead hero, and when the wound failed to heal, he was advised by an oracle (or the Delphic oracle specifically) to seek a cure from Ajax himself on Leuce (the White Island) in the Black Sea, which was the posthumous home of Achilles and other great heroes of the Trojan War (see p. 105). On arriving there, he offered sacrifice to these heroes and to Ajax, who duly healed him of his wound. Now Helen was living there too, as the posthumous consort of Achilles, and she took advantage of the visit of this man from Croton to ask him to take a message to the poet Stesichorus, who lived in Sicily no very great distance from his home city. For she had blinded the poet for insulting her in one of his poems, and she now wanted him to know that he would recover his sight if he composed a recantation to retract what he had said. It was as a result of this message, so the story claims, that Stesichorus wrote his famous Palinode, or poem of recantation, in which he asserted that the Helen who eloped to Troy with Paris was a mere phantom rather than the heroine herself (see further on p. 456). By virtue of this connection, it can be inferred that these events were supposed to have occurred in the first half of the sixth century BC.²⁰⁷

The little town of Temesa, in which our second story was set, was apparently not of Greek foundation, although it became strongly Hellenized and there was a tradition that the Calydonian hero Thoas (see p. 388) had founded it after the Trojan War. It was supposed to have been troubled in the earliest times by an aggressive ghost, the so-called HERO OF TEMESA. The problem had begun, so the story went, when Odysseus called in at the town in the course of his wanderings, and one of his followers, a certain Polites (who is mentioned in the *Odyssey* as a victim of Circe's enchantments) got drunk and raped a local girl; for the inhabitants responded by stoning him to death, and his angry spirit then proceeded to subject them to a reign of terror, murdering some of them and attacking others, old and young alike. Although the Temesians wanted to abandon their town as a result and leave Italy altogether, the Delphic oracle advised them to appease their tormentor by honouring

him as a hero, building him a shrine to him, and sacrificing the most beautiful of their maidens to him each year to be his bride. This proved effective in stopping the attacks, although at the cost of the grim annual sacrifice, which was offered every year, so the story claims, until a boxer called Euthymos happened to visit Temesa when Polites was about to receive one of his brides. This Euthymos was a historical figure, a famous boxer from Locri in southern Italy who won Olympian victories in 484, 476, and 472 BC. Feeling pity for the girl who was due to be sacrificed, and then falling in love with her, he set out to save her after she swore that she would marry him. So he lay in wait at the shrine in place of her, and fought against the hero, giving him such a beating that he fled the land, dived into the sea, and disappeared forever. This was evidently a very sturdy ghost, more like a revenant than a shade. Euthymos himself came to be honoured in hero-cult in his native Locri.²⁰⁸

Notes

- 1 A.R. 4.263–5 with schol. 264 (citing Aristotle = fr. 549 Rose, and other authors).
- 2 Paus. 8.1.4, citing Asius (= fr. 8 Davies); Pelasgos as earthborn, also Apollod. 2.1.1 and 3.8.1 citing Hesiod (= fr. 160), and Str. 5.2.4 citing Ephorus (= 70F113) and quoting Hesiodic verses (= fr. 161).
- 3 Paus. 8.4.1.
- 4 Paus. 8.1.5–6.
- 5 Apollod. 3.8.1., schol. Eur. *Orest.* 1645, cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 161 (Lycaon son of Pelasgos).
- 6 Paus. 8.2.1, cf. schol. Eur. *Orest.* 1648 (named Zeus as Lycaios, founded games); on Mt Lycaon, see Paus. 8.38, gilded eagles, 8.38.7.
- 7 Apollod. 3.8.1; for a different catalogue, see Paus. 8.3.1–5.
- 8 Apollod. 3.8.1.
- 9 Apollod. 3.81, Eratosth. 8, schol. Lyc. 481; otherwise named after its founder Trapezous, son of Lycaon, Paus. 8.3.2, Steph. Byz. s.v. Trapezous.
- 10 Hyg. *Fab.* 176.
- 11 Nic. Damasc. 90F38.
- 12 Eratosth. 8, citing Hesiod = fr. 163.
- 13 Ov. *Met.* 1.218–39.
- 14 Paus. 8.2.3.
- 15 Paus. 8.2.6, cf. Pl. *Rep.* 565d and Pliny *N.H.* 8.81.
- 16 Apollod. 3.8.2, Paus. 8.3.1.
- 17 Apollod. 3.8.2, cf. the similar version cited in Hyg. *Astr.* 2.1.
- 18 Artemis kills her unknowingly, Call. fr. 362, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.1; kills her knowingly, e.g. Paus. 8.3.6.
- 19 Ov. *Met.* 2.401–530; although Ovid does not name the constellations here, he does so in the *Fasti* in connection with the rising of Bootes, 2.189–92.
- 20 Eratosth. 1, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.1.
- 21 Paus. 8.38.6.
- 22 Amphis fr. 47 (as reported in Hyg. *str.* 2.1, etc.), Ov. *Met.* 2.425–7.
- 23 As nymph, Apollod. 3.8.2 citing Hesiod (= fr. 163); as daughter of Lycaon, Eratosth. 1, citing Hesiod (possibly the *Astronomy* if the report can be relied upon).
- 24 Eumelus fr. 10 Davies, Asius fr. 9 Davies, Pher. 3F157 (all in Apollod. 3.8.2).
- 25 Paus. 8.4.1.
- 26 Apollod. 3.9.1, Paus. 4.1.2 (Includes Azan).
- 27 Paus. 4.1.3–4.
- 28 Apollod. 3.9.1, Paus. 8.4.8.
- 29 Hom. *Il.* 7.137–47, cf. Paus. 8.4.10, 8.11.4 (tomb of Areithoos by narrow road).
- 30 A.R. 1.397–8, 425–30; on Bebrycians, *ibid.* 2.118ff.
- 31 Paus. 8.45.2, 7.
- 32 A.R. 1.167–71.

- 33 A.R. 1.397–8, 425–30; on Bebrycians, *ibid.* 2.118ff.
- 34 Hom. *Il.* 2.609–14.
- 35 Hom. *Il.* 2.603–4.
- 36 Paus. 8.16.2–3.
- 37 Pi. *Ol.* 6.27–57.
- 38 Pi. *Ol.* 6.57–71; Phaisane *ibid.* 34.
- 39 Paus. 8.4.6.
- 40 Apollod. 3.12.6.
- 41 Paus. 8.5.4.
- 42 Paus. 8.5.5, 8.10.2–3.
- 43 Paus. 8.5.6.
- 44 Athene Alea, Paus. 8.4.8; Aleos as founder of Tegea, 8.45.1.
- 45 Paus. 8.4.9, cf. Str. 13.1.69 (that mother and child put into chest in unnamed play by Euripides).
- 46 Apollod. 2.7.4, 3.9.1.
- 47 D.S. 4.33.7–12.
- 48 Alcidas *Odyss.* 14–16.
- 49 Hes. fr. 165; see also Hyg. *Fab.* 99, 100 for stories in which Auge is the adopted daughter of Teuthras.
- 50 E.g. Apollod. 3.9.2.
- 51 Apollod. 3.9.2; more detailed account of confrontation with Centaurs in Ael. *V.H.* 13.1.
- 52 D.S. 4.48.5, Apollod. 1.19.6.
- 53 A.R. 1.769–73.
- 54 Apollod. 3.9.2, 3.13.3.
- 55 E.g. Apollod. 1.8.2, Ov. *Met.* 8.380ff.
- 56 Paus. 8.46.1.
- 57 Apollod. 3.9.2.
- 58 Hes. fr. 75.
- 59 E.g. Apollod. 3.9.2.
- 60 Hes. fr. 74 and 76 (Hippomenes), Apollod. 3.9.2 (Melanion), Ov. *Met.* 10.560–680 (Hippomenes), Hyg. *Fab.* 185 (Hippomenes).
- 61 Hesperides, Serv. *Aen.* 3.113; Tamasus, Ov. *Met.* 10.644–51.
- 62 Ov. *A.A.* 2.185–92, cf. Xen. *On Hunting* 1.7.
- 63 Ov. *Met.* 10.681–704, cf. Serv. *Aen.* 3.113; in shrine of Zeus, Apollod. 3.9.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 185. Story first mentioned in Palaeph. 13.
- 64 Hyg. *Fab.* 185, Serv. *Aen.* 3.113.
- 65 E.g. Hellanic. 4F99 (by Melanion), Hyg. *Fab.* 99 (by Meleager), Apollod. 3.9.2 (by Ares or Melanion).
- 66 Paus. 8.47.6.
- 67 Hom. *Il.* 6.152–4, Apollod. 1.9.3.
- 68 Hom. *Il.* 6.152–5.
- 69 Pher. 3F119, cf. Apollod. 3.12.6 (passing reference only); earliest allusions to episode, Alcaeus 38, Theognis 702–12; Paus. 2.5.1 (bribed with offer of spring).
- 70 Hom. *Od.* 19.394–8.
- 71 *Ibid.* 19. 386ff.
- 72 Hyg. *Fab.* 201, schol. Lyc. 344; on Autolykos' powers, see also Hes. fr. 67.
- 73 Hyg. *Fab.* 201, schol. Lyc. 344.
- 74 Hes. fr. 64, Pher. 3F120, Paus. 4.33.3.
- 75 Paus. 2.1.3, cf. Apollod. 3.4.3.
- 76 Hom. *Il.* 6.154–5 (wife not named), Asclep. 12F1, Apollod. 1.9.3.
- 77 Asclep. 12F1 (perhaps following the lost *Glaukos Potnieus* of Aeschylus), cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 250 (devoured at funeral games for Pelias, no details), Paus. 6.20.19.
- 78 Verg. *Georg.* 3.266–8 with Serv. on 268.
- 79 Schol. Eur. *Orest.* 318, Et. Magn. s.v. Potniades, Pliny *N.H.* 25.94.
- 80 Serv. *Aen.* 268; on the well, see Paus. 9.8.1.
- 81 Paus. 6.20.19.
- 82 Paus. 6.20.15–18 (offering other suggestions too).
- 83 Apollod. 1.9.3 (Eurymede), Hyg. *Fab.* 157 (Eurynome), cf. Hom. *Il.* 6.154 (Bellerophon, son of Glaukos).
- 84 Hes. fr. 43a 2–83.
- 85 Paus. 2.4.3.

- 86 Eumelos fr. 3A and 5 Davies (from Paus. 2.3.8 and 2.1.1).
- 87 Schol. Eur. *Med.* 20.
- 88 Paus. 2.1.1, Pl. *Nem.* 7.104–5 with schol. 155, Pl. *Euthyd.* 292e.
- 89 Paus. 7.23.1–2.
- 90 Paus. 7.19.1–3; Eurypylos, Hom. *Il.* 2.734–7 and *passim*.
- 91 Paus. 7.21.1.
- 92 Hom. *Il.* 9.379–84.
- 93 Paus. 9.36.3.
- 94 Apollod. 2.4.11, Paus. 9.37.2.
- 95 D.S. 4.10.5 (Heracles razes Orchomenos), Paus. 9.38.5 (floods plain).
- 96 Paus. 9.34.5–37.3.
- 97 Paus. 9.37.2–3.
- 98 Paus. 8.10.2.
- 99 Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 296–7, Paus. 10.5.5.
- 100 Paus. 9.11.1 and 9.37.3 respectively.
- 101 Plut. *Moralia* 109a (citing Pindar), ps.Pl. *Axiochos* 367c, Cic. *Tusc.* 1.47.
- 102 Hdt. 1.31, Cic. *Tusc.* 1.47 (specifies that their mother was a priestess of Hera); see Paus. 2.19.4 for another story about Biton.
- 103 Paus. 9.37.3.
- 104 As in Paus. l.c.
- 105 Schol. Arist. *Clouds* 508.
- 106 Hdt. 2.121.
- 107 Paus. 9.40.1.
- 108 Paus. 9.39.4, Lucian *D.M.* 3.2.
- 109 Hom. *Il.* 13.298–302.
- 110 E.g. Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 278–80, schol. *Il.* 13.301.
- 111 Paus. 9.36.1–2.
- 112 Serv. *Aen.* 6.618, schol. Stat. *Theb.* 1.713.
- 113 Verg. *Aen.* 6.616–20, cf. Stat. *Theb.* 1.712ff, Val. Flacc. 2.192ff.
- 114 Apollod. 3. 5. 5, Paus. 9.36.1 respectively.
- 115 Coronis as daughter of Phlegyas, Hes. fr. 60, Apollod. 3.10.3, etc.; she lived by the Boibian Lake in the Dotian Fields, Hes. fr. 59, cf. Pl. *Pyth.* 3.34, Hom. *Hymn* 16 to *Asclepios* 2–3, hence Dotis as a name for the mother of Phlegyas.
- 116 E.g. schol. A.R. 3.62 (citing Euripides = fr. 424 Nauck), Steph. Byz. s.v. Gyrton respectively. Gyrton was the city of Ixion and Peirithoos; the Phlegyans were sometimes identified with the Gyrtonians, e.g. schol. *Il.* 13.301, 302.
- 117 Hom. *Hymn. Apollo* 278–80; on Phlegya, Steph. Byz. s.v. Phlegya.
- 118 Paus. 9.36.1.
- 119 Schol. *Il.* 13.302.
- 120 Pher. 3F41.
- 121 Hom. *Od.* 11.572–5, *Il.* 18.486.
- 122 Hom. *Il.* 22.26–30, 18.487–8, *Od.* 5.273–4.
- 123 Hom. *Od.* 11.308–10, 5.121–4.
- 124 Hes. fr. 148a (= Eratosth. 32), Pher. 3F52.
- 125 Ov. *Fasti* 5.493–536, Hyg. *Fab.* 195, Astr. 2.34, schol. *Il.* 18.486, schol. *Od.* 5.121; first mentioned Palaeph. 51.
- 126 Apollod. 1.4.3.
- 127 Schol. Nic. *Ther.* 15; tomb, Paus. 9.20.3.
- 128 Corinna 654.38, 655.14, 662, 673, Euphorion fr. 103 Powell.
- 129 Apollod. 1.4.3, Ovid *Art of Love* 1.731 (only other reference to Side), Athen. 650f. (on Sidai).
- 130 Ant. Lib. 25, cf. Ov. *Met.* 13.685–99.
- 131 Schol. A.R. 3.997 (birth), D.S. 5.79.1 (learned art of wine-making from Dionysos), Athen. 26b (red wine on Chios).
- 132 Eratosth. 32 (ascribed to Hes. = fr. 148a), Parthen. 20 (events on Chios only, daughter of Oinopion called Hairo), Apollod. 1.4.3, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.34, Lucian *Dom.* 28–9 (guided by Cedalion, cured by Helios).
- 133 Apollod. 1.4.5, schol. *Od.* 5.121.
- 134 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.34 citing Call. (= fr. 570), Horace *Ode* 3.4.70–2.
- 135 Eratosth. 32, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.26; cf. Nic. *Ther.* 15 (Artemis and Leto send scorpion against him for some

reason).

- 136 Aratus 634–46, cf. Eratosth. 7, schol. *Il.* 18.486 citing Euphorion (= fr. 101 Powell), Palaeph. 51.
- 137 Schol. German. Arat. 63–4.
- 138 Ov. *Fasti* 5.537–44.
- 139 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.3 citing Istros (= Istros 334F64).
- 140 Hes. *W.D.* 383.
- 141 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.21 (seven years), schol. Pi. *Nem.* 2.16 (five years), schol. A.R. 3.225.
- 142 Schol. Arat. 254, schol. *Il.* 18.486.
- 143 Hyg. *Fab.* 192, cf. Hyg. *Astr.* 2.21, schol. *Il.* 18.486.
- 144 See Athen. 491b.
- 145 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.21, Eratosth. 23, Ov. *Fasti* 4.175–6, Serv. *Georg.* 1.138.
- 146 Ovid *Fasti* 4.177–8, schol. Arat. 257, Q.S. 13.551–61; as comet, Hyg. *Fab.* 192, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.21, schol. *Il.* 18.486.
- 147 Paus. 9.31.6.
- 148 Ov. *Met.* 3.341–510.
- 149 Conon 24.
- 150 Pap. Oxy. LXIX.4711.
- 151 Pl. *Symp.* 179d, A.R. 1.23–5, Apollod. 1.3.2, etc.; son of Apollo, e.g. Asclepiades 12F6.
- 152 Simonides 567, Aesch. *Ag.* 1629–30, Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 1211–14, *Bacch.* 560–4, A.R. 1.26–31, D.S. 4.25.2.
- 153 Eratosth. 24, schol. Arat. 269, Vat. Myth. 2.44.
- 154 Conon 45.2, Apollod. 1.3.2, Ov. *Met.* 10.1–85, Verg. *Georg.* 454–503, ps.Verg. *Culex* 268–95.
- 155 See Eur. *Alc.* 357–62, Eratosth. 24 referring to Aeschylus.
- 156 Moschus 3.124.
- 157 Ov. *Met.* 11.1–66, Verg. *Georg.* 4.520–7.
- 158 Phanocles fr. 1 Powell, cf. Hyg. *Astr.* 2.7 (some say that torn apart because introduced love of young boys).
- 159 Conon 45.4, Paus. 9.30.3 respectively.
- 160 Eratosth. 24.
- 161 Paus. 9.30.3, Hyg. *Astr.* 2.7 respectively.
- 162 Ov. *Met.* 11.44–9.
- 163 Phanocles fr. 1 Powell, Plut. *Moralia* 557e; contrasting account in *Anth. Pal.* 7.10.
- 164 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.7, Ov. *Met.* 11.50–60, Aristides 24.
- 165 Ov. *Met.* 11.50–5, Phanocles fr. 1.19 (buried with head), Lucian *Adv. Indoc.* 11 (placed in temple).
- 166 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.7.
- 167 Verg. *Aen.* 1.316–17.
- 168 Hyg. *Fab.* 193; rescues father from Getae, Serv. *Aen.* 1.317.
- 169 Call. fr. 67–75, Aristaenetus Ep. 1.10, Ovid *Heroides* 20, 21.
- 170 Ov. *Met.* 10.106–42.
- 171 Serv. *Aen.* 3.680; Syrian location also in Philostr. V.A. 1.16.
- 172 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.16.
- 173 Schol. *Il.* 24.293.
- 174 Steph. Byz. s.v. Merops and Kos.
- 175 A.R. 2.854–95; Schol. A.R. 1.188, schol. Lyc. 488.
- 176 Ael. V.H. 12.18 (states that executed for adultery), Palaeph. 49, Serv. *Aen.* 3.279.
- 177 Str. 10.2.9 (quoting Menander = fr. 285 K.), Suid. s.v. Sappho (second notice).
- 178 Athen. 2.69d, citing Cratinus (= fr. 370 PCG).
- 179 Hom. *Il.* 11.19–40.
- 180 Apollod. *Epit.* 3.9, Eustath. On *Il.* 11.20.
- 181 Alcidas Odyss. 20–1.
- 182 E.g. schol. Pi. *Pyth.* 2.27, Apollod. 3.14.3 respectively.
- 183 Ov. *Met.* 10.298ff, Hyg. *Fab.* 58.
- 184 Apollod. 3.14.3.
- 185 Hyg. *Fab.* 242, Pliny *N.H.* 7.49, Eustath. on *Il.* 11.20 respectively.
- 186 Eustath. l.c.
- 187 Apollod. 3.14.3.
- 188 Ov. *Met.* 10.238–42.
- 189 Ibid. 10.243–97.
- 190 Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 4.57.3.

- 191 Musaeus *Hero and Leander*; Verg. *Georg.* 3.258–63, Ov. *Heroides* 18, 19.
- 192 Ov. *Met.* 8.618–724.
- 193 A. Westermann *Mythographoi*, 1843, p. 324.
- 194 Ov. *Met.* 4.55–166.
- 195 Pliny *N.H.* 7.1–32.
- 196 Hom. *Il.* 3.3–7.
- 197 Ant. Lib. 16, Athen. 9.393e–f, Ael. *N.A.* 15.29; allusion in Ov. *Met.* 6.90–2.
- 198 Hdt. 2.32, cf. Hes. fr. 150.9–19, Arist. *H.A.* 8.12.
- 199 Philostr. *Imag.* 2.22, Ammianus 22.12.4.
- 200 Aristeas fr. 4A Davies (from Str. 1.2.10, Pliny *N.H.* 7.10 and Paus. 1.24.6), Hdt. 3.116, 4.13, 4.27, Aesch. *Prom. Bound* 803–6.
- 201 Hdt. 1.23–4.
- 202 Hyg. *Fab.* 194, Astr. 2.17, Serv. *Ecl.* 8.55, cf. Ov. *Fast.* 2.81ff.
- 203 Hdt. 1.24, Paus. 3.25.7.
- 204 Athen. 11.446c–d, Plut. *Moralia* 163c, 984d.
- 205 Pliny *N.H.* 9.8–26.
- 206 Paus. 10.10.3.
- 207 Conon 18, Paus. 3.19.11–13.
- 208 Paus. 6.6.8–10, cf. Call. fr. 98–9, Ael. *V.H.* 8.18 (Hero exacted a tribute, Euthymos forced him to repay it with interest), Str. 6.1.5 (temple of Polites at Temesa).

Bibliographical note

Three good dictionaries of classical mythology are currently available in English. The oldest is that of Pierre Grimal, which was first published in Paris in 1951; it has been issued in two English editions, as *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, a full translation with references to ancient sources) and as *The Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (1991, abridged with some alterations, without references). It is useful and generally reliable, if perhaps somewhat dull. An edition of Edward Tripp's *Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology* has been published in Britain as *Collins Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (2002). It concentrates for the most part on myths from the more accessible sources and main ancient anthologies, but it is broader in its range of reference than the other two dictionaries in some other respects, for it includes entries on peoples, places, and authors. Readers who have no special knowledge of the ancient world may find it particularly helpful for that reason. Jenny March's *Cassell Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London, 1998) is scholarly and accessible, a model of its kind; it is both enjoyable to dip into and useful as work of reference.

Various other dictionaries have been published. William Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography* (3 vols, London, 1844) is an old war-horse that deserves an honourable mention; and Richard Stoneman's little dictionary, *Greek Mythology* (London, 1991) departs from the common pattern by including entries on post-classical legend and folklore.

We must next turn to two authors who have produced well-known surveys of Greek myth in two volumes. Carl Kerényi's *Gods of the Greeks* (London, 1951) and *Heroes of the Greek* (London, 1974) are works of strong individual character founded on an exhaustive knowledge of the ancient sources. Robert Graves' Penguin guide, *The Greek Myths* (first published in 1955), makes attractive reading and conveys much solid information, but should be approached with extreme caution, nonetheless. Although Graves was certainly well acquainted with the relevant ancient sources, he tended to run together material of diverse origin and value when constructing his summaries of the various bodies of myth, and the resulting narratives are by no means free of eccentric errors and arbitrary fancies. As for the explanatory notes, they are either the greatest single contribution that has ever been made to the interpretation of Greek myth or else a farrago of cranky nonsense; I fear that it would be impossible to find any classical scholar who would agree with the former diagnosis.

To proceed to works of a more academic character, Timothy Gantz's *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to the Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore and London, 1 vol. in

cloth, 1993; 2 vols in paperback, 1996) can be recommended unreservedly as a comprehensive guide to the early mythical tradition; anyone who wants to trace the early development of Greek myths in the original sources will find it invaluable. Although it concentrates on archaic myth in particular, as the title would suggest, it takes due account of the standard later tradition as reported by authors such as Apollodorus and Hyginus; the artistic record is primarily referred to in so far as it provides the earliest evidence for myths or for specific variants or motifs. Full and detailed information on the ancient artistic representations of myths and figures from myth can be found in the magnificent volumes of the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (1981 onward). The various publications of Karl Schefold (some of which have been translated into English, see below) can also be very helpful in this regard. The other main reference works on Greek myth are German works of long standing. An exhaustive analysis of the entire corpus of Greek heroic mythology is provided by Carl Robert in *Die griechische Heldensage* (3 vols, Berlin, 1920–6; = *Griechische Mythologie* 2, and originally undertaken as a revision of the work of that title by Ludwig Preller). Alas, it has no index. The most comprehensive articles on individual figures from Greek mythology are to be found in two German encyclopaedias, Roscher's *Lexicon*, which is devoted exclusively to classical mythology, and the great *Realencyclopädie*, which is a general encyclopaedia of classical civilization. The former (W.H. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*) was published in six volumes with four supplements at Leipzig from 1884 to 1937. The articles tended to get longer and more detailed as the work progressed. Although the interpretations (especially in the earlier volumes) often appeal to outdated theories of nature-symbolism, the articles provide very useful and often very thorough surveys of the mythological traditions associated with major and minor figures from classical myth and legend. The corresponding articles in the eighty volumes of 'Pauly-Wissowa' (*Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart, 1894–1963) naturally show some variation in their comprehensiveness and quality, but this is generally one of the richest resources available to the mythologist. The abridged version, *Der Kleine Pauly*, edited in five volumes by W. Sontheimer and K. Ziegler (Stuttgart, 1964), can also be very helpful, especially for hunting references.

There is no end to the number of books that have been written on Greek mythology. As two introductory work of rather different kinds, I would recommend Fritz Graf, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore, 1993) and G.S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myth* (Harmondsworth, 1974). I have otherwise picked out a small selection of books in the hope of providing profitable suggestions for further reading, especially to those who have no special knowledge of the field.

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Table 1 The first gods and the origins of the Olympians

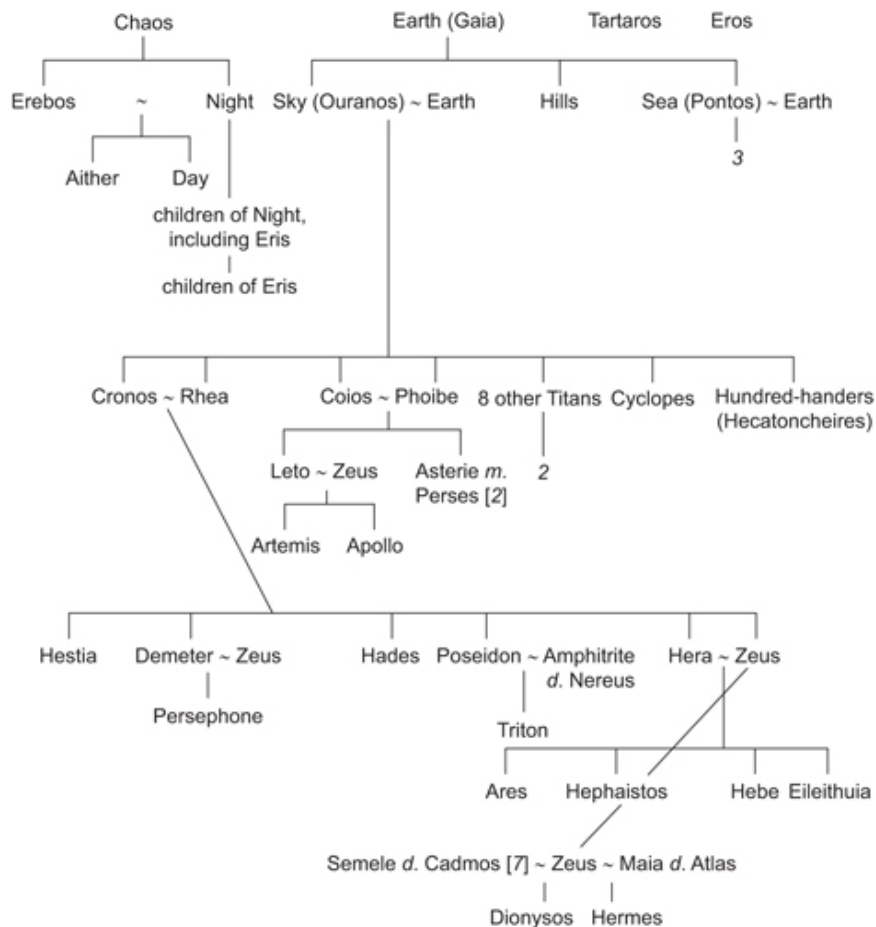


Table 2 Descendants of the Titans

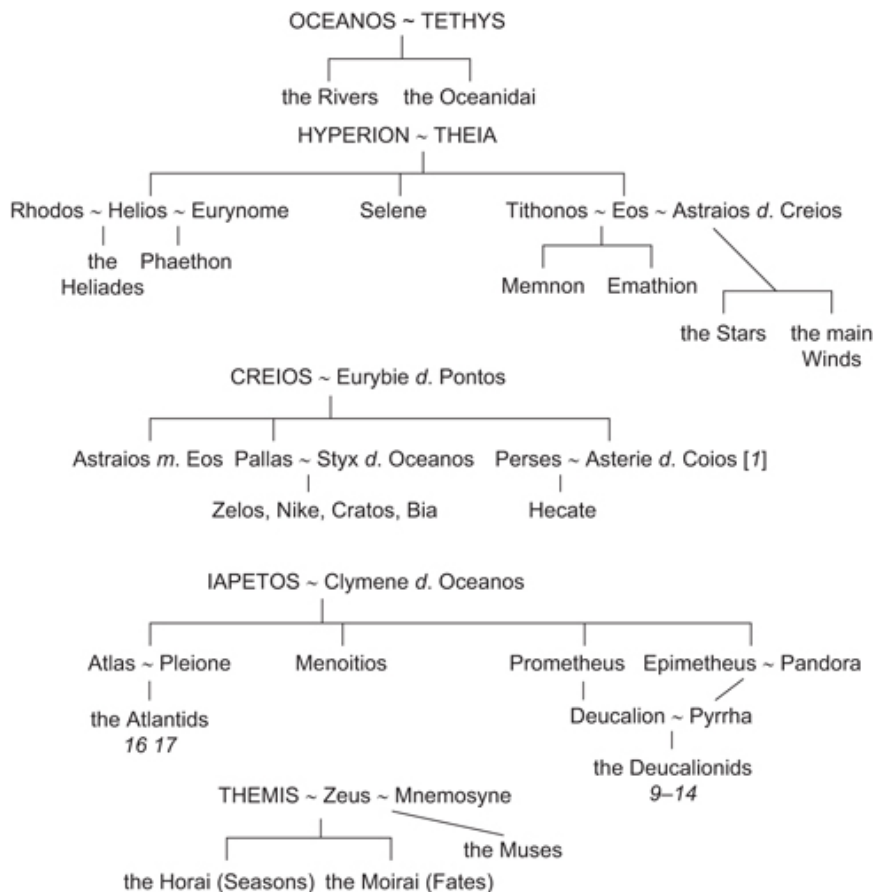


Table 3 The descendants of Sea and Earth

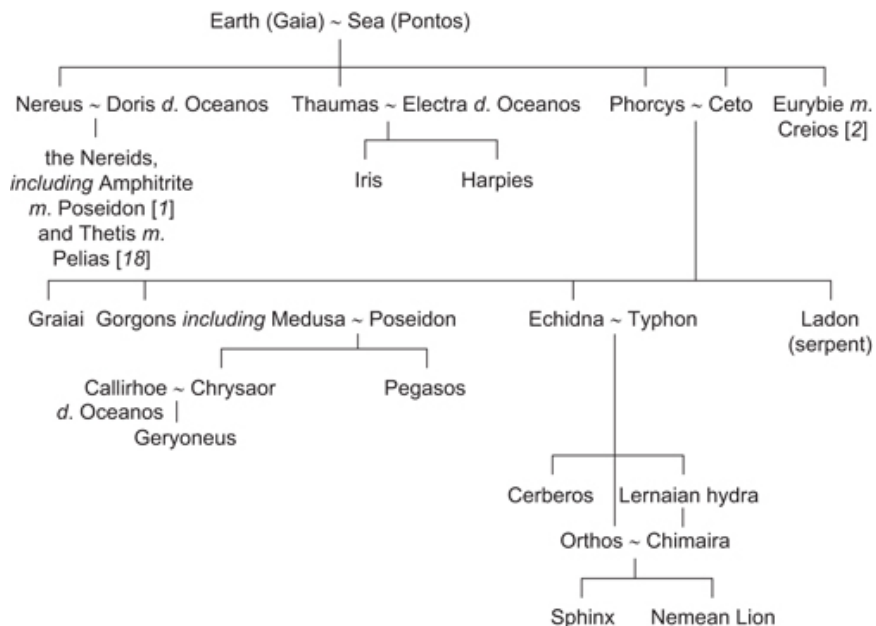


Table 4 Inachids 1: The early Inachids in Argos and Egypt

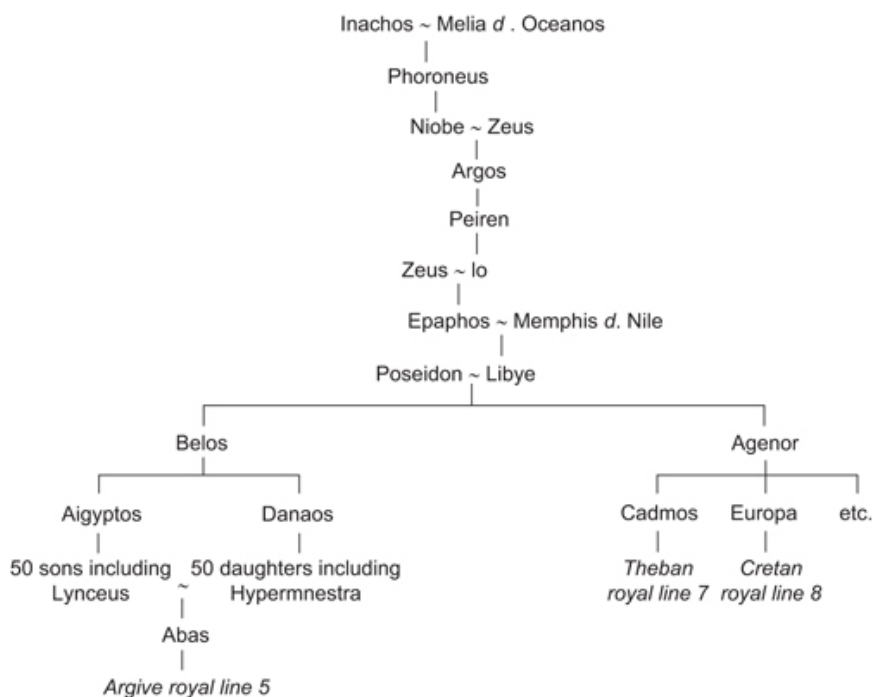


Table 5 Inachids 2: The descendants of Danaos in the Argolid

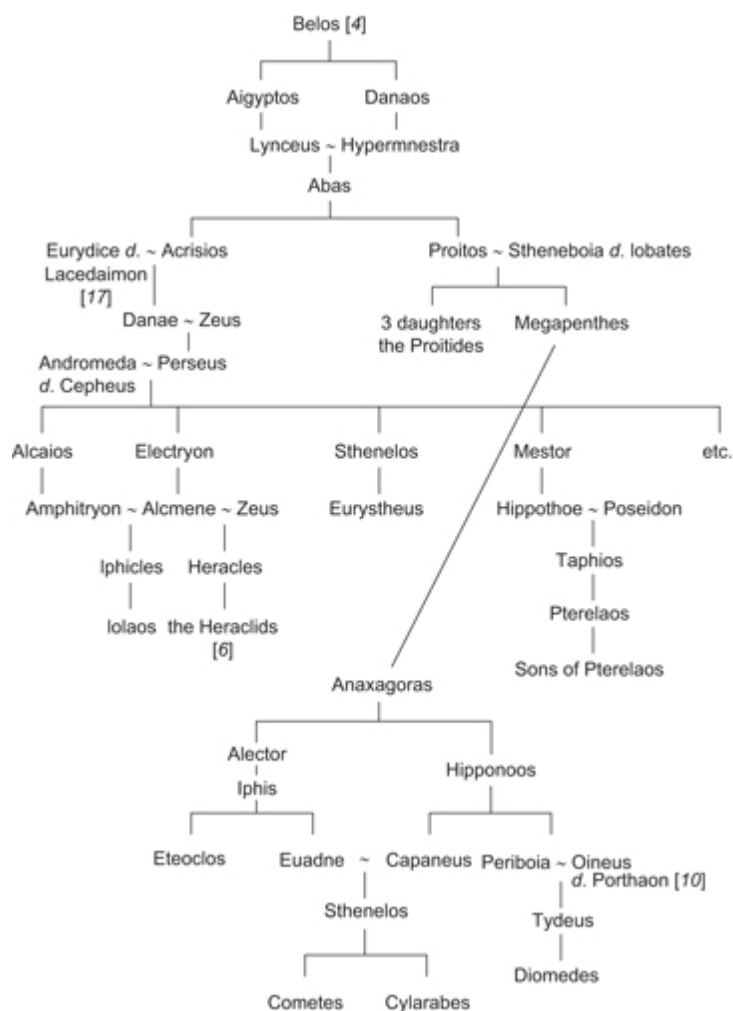


Table 6 Inachids 3: The Heraclids

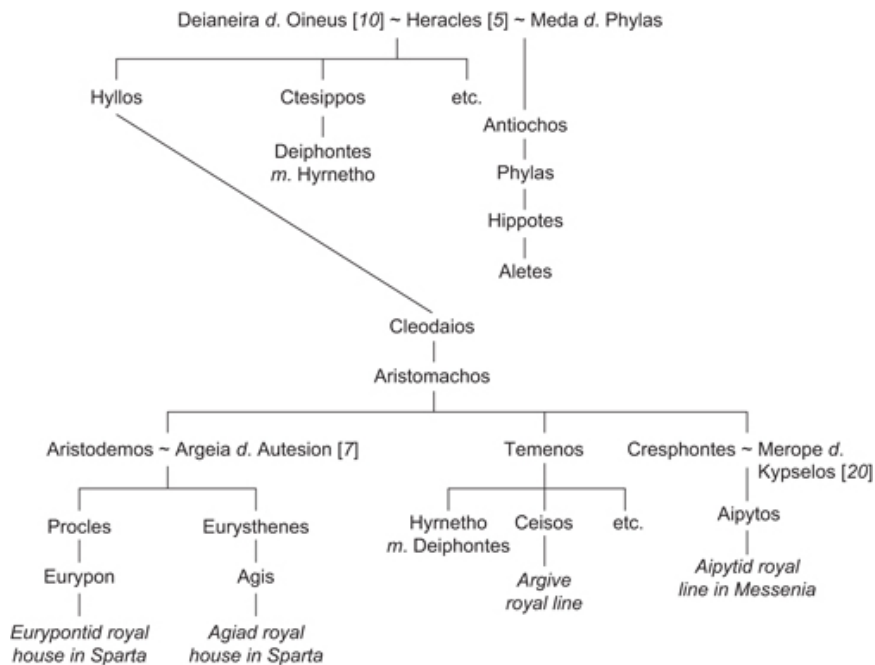


Table 7 Inachids 4: The descendants of Cadmos at Thebes

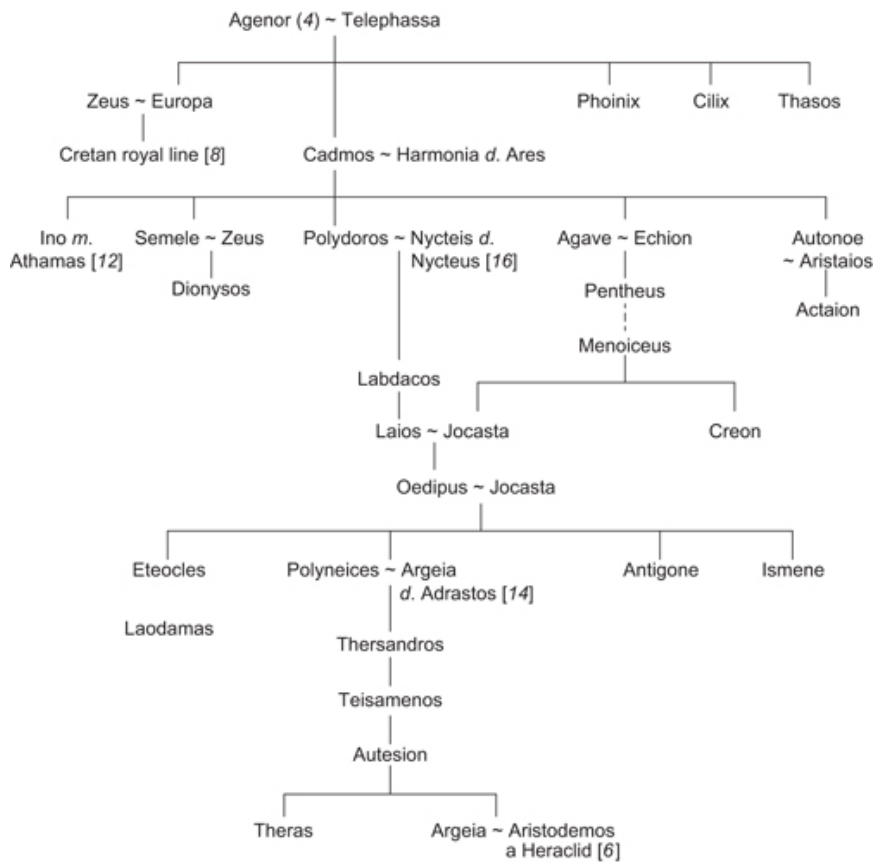


Table 8 Inachids 5: The descendants of Europa in Crete

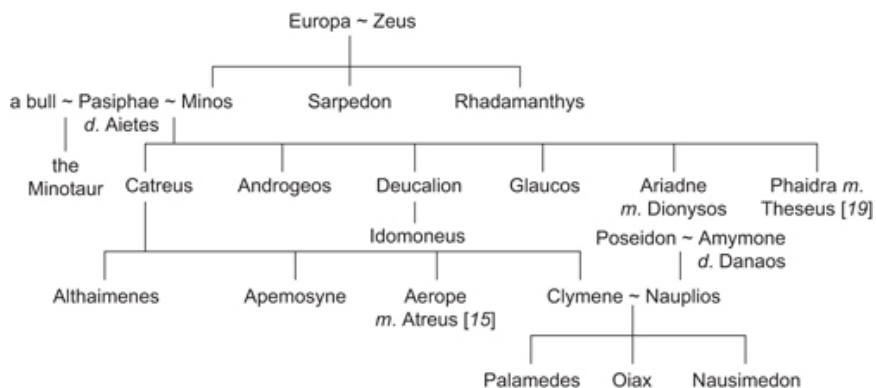


Table 9 Deucalionids 1: The early Deucalionids

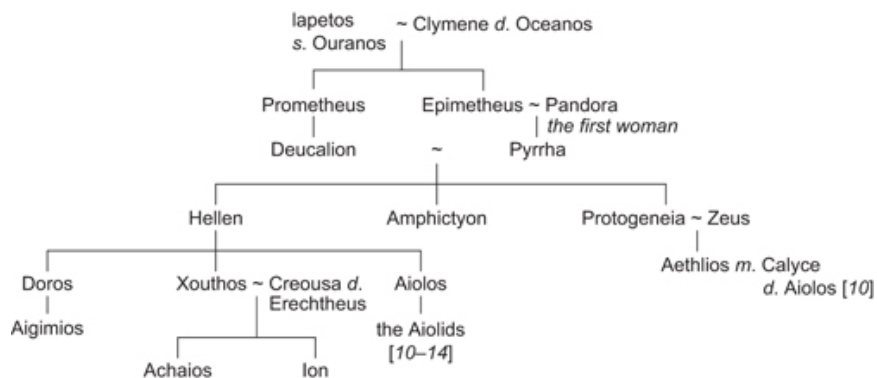


Table 10 Deucalionids 2: The Aetolian royal family

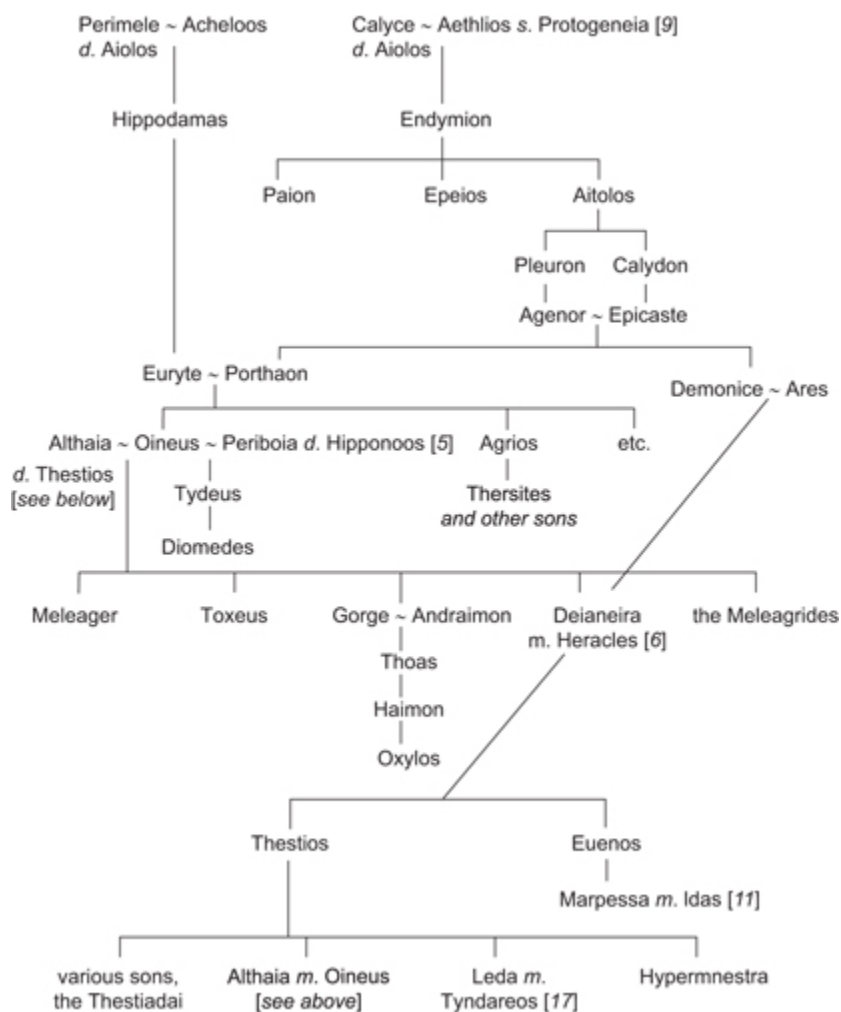


Table 11 Deucalionids 3: Descendants of Aiolos in Messenia and Thessaly

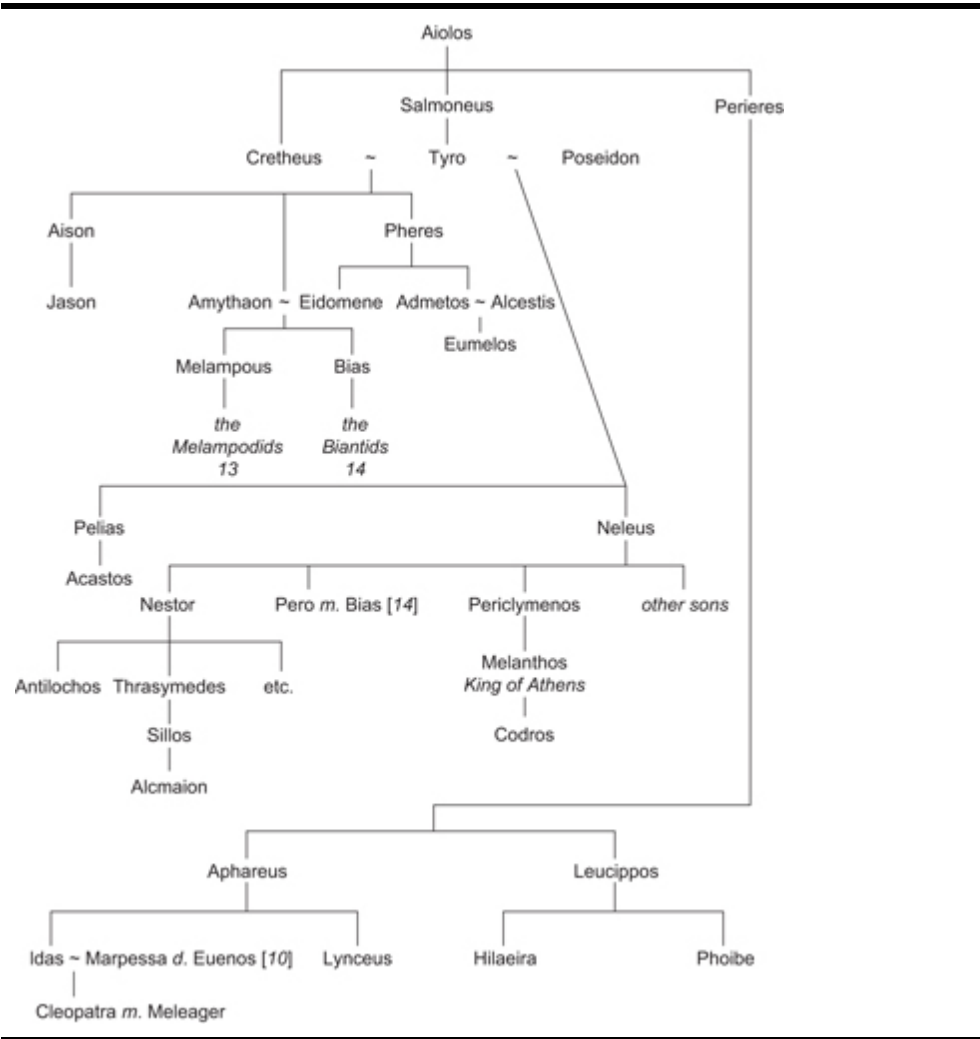


Table 12 Deucalionids 4: Further descendants of Aiolos

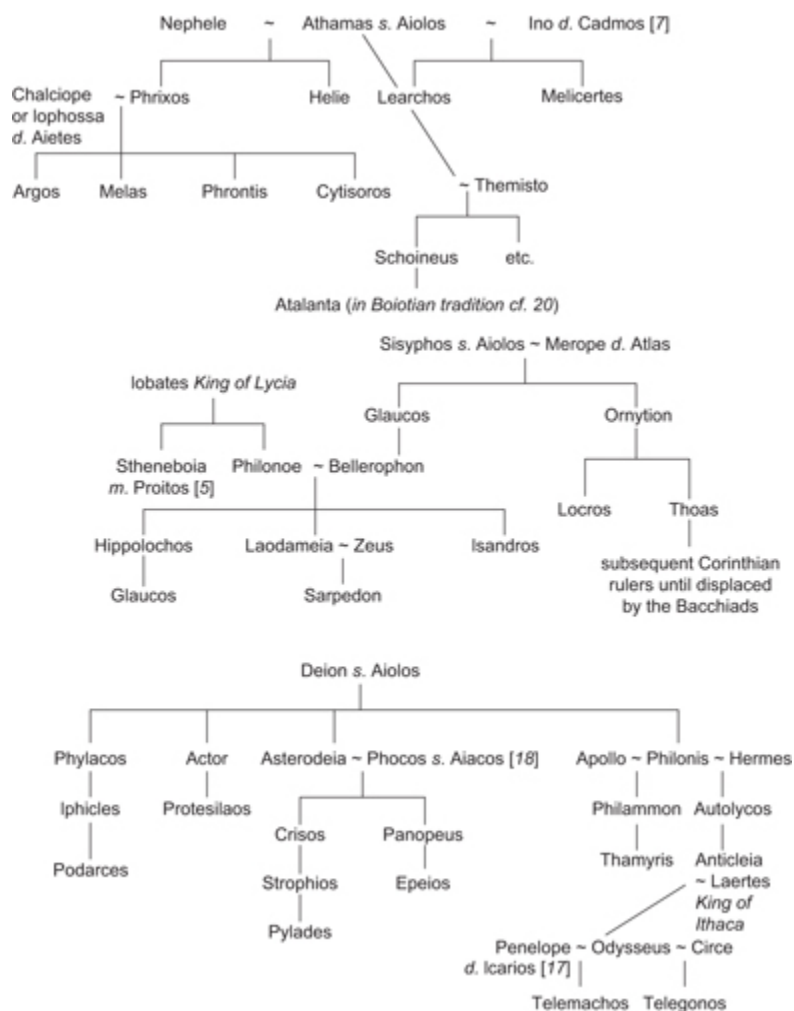
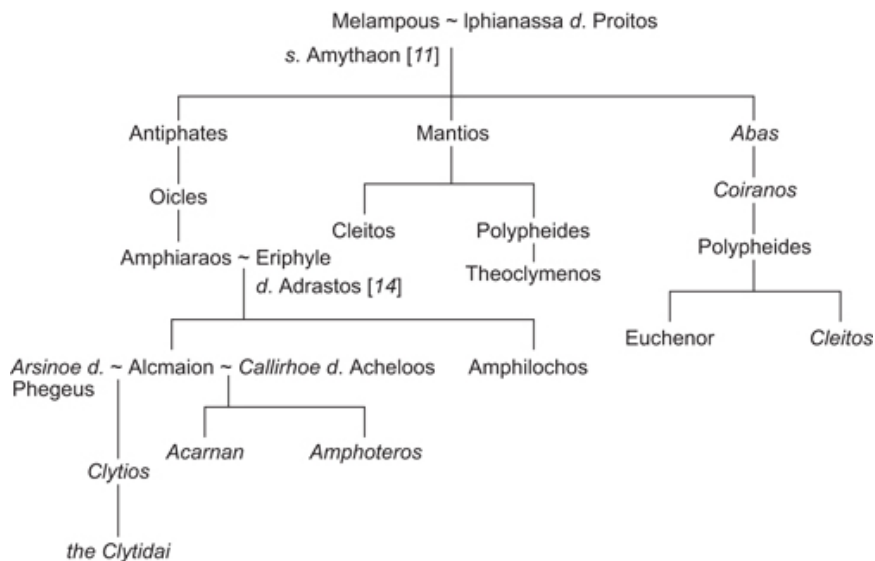


Table 13 Deucalionids 5: The descendants of Melampus



Note: The names marked in *italics* are those not mentioned by Homer in his account of the family in *Odyssey* 15. 225–56.

Table 14 Deucalionids 6: The descendants of Bias

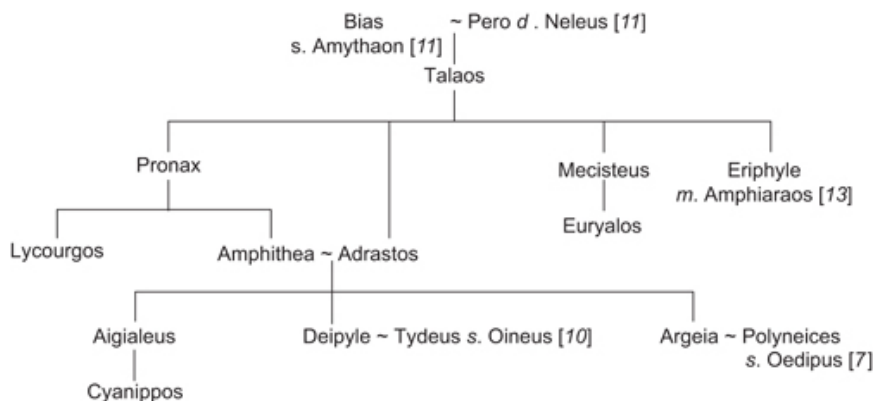


Table 15 The Pelopids

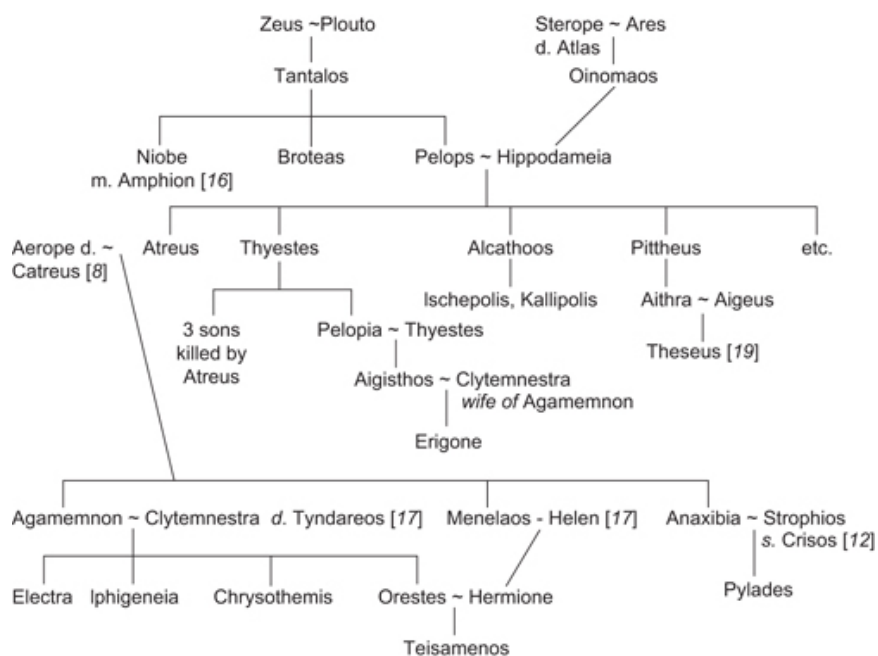


Table 16 Atlantids 1: The Trojan royal family and the descendants of Alcyone

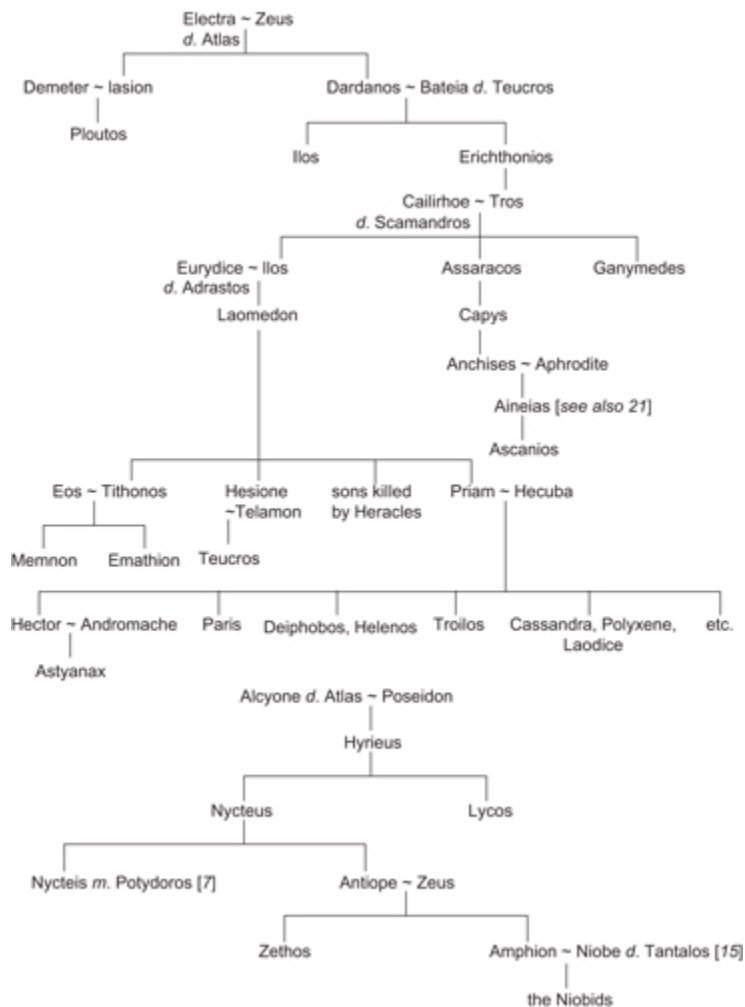


Table 17 Atlantids 2: The early Spartan royal family

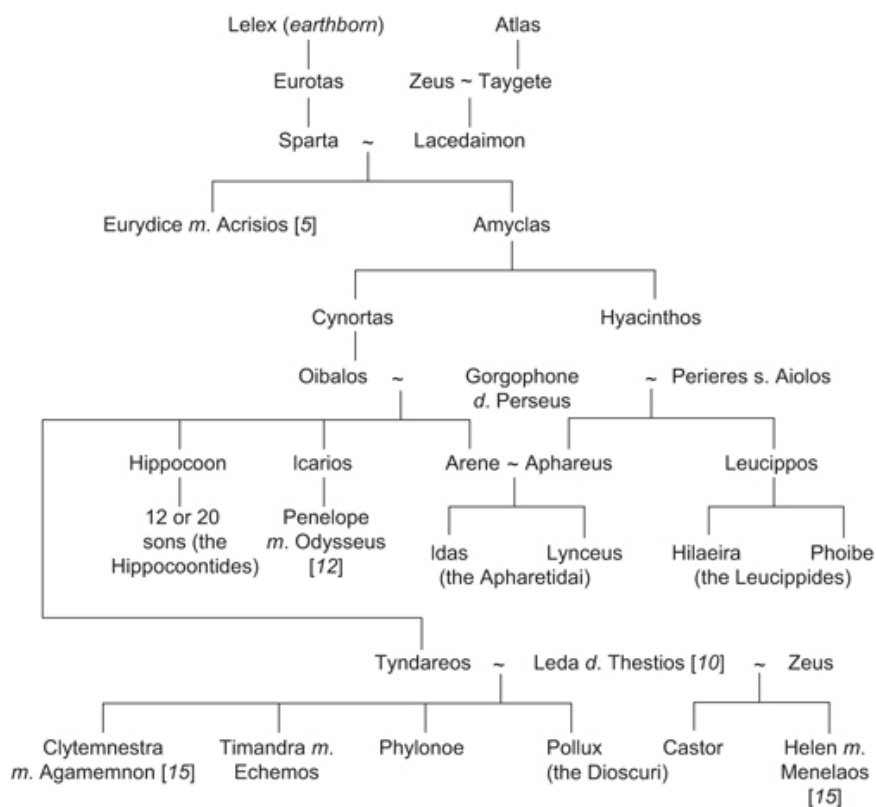


Table 18 The Asopids

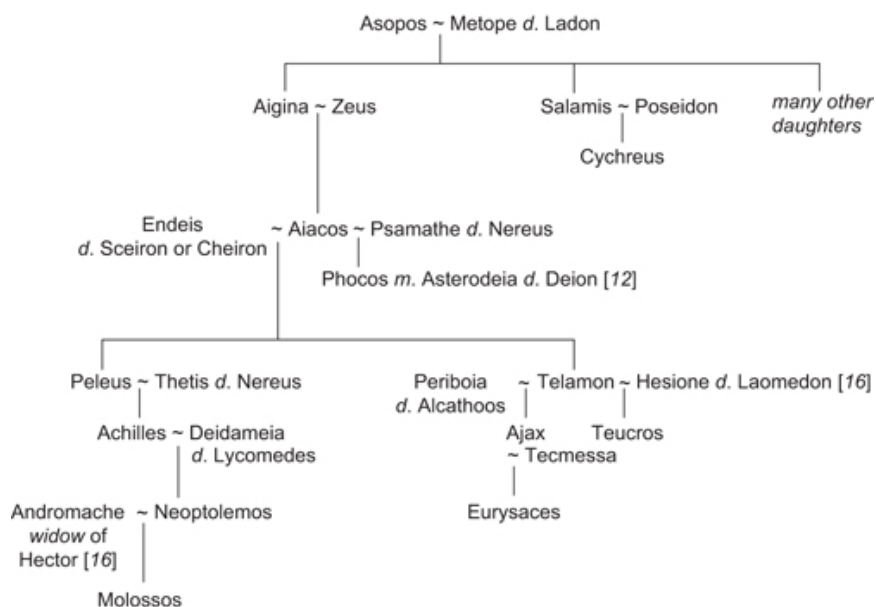


Table 19 The kings of Athens

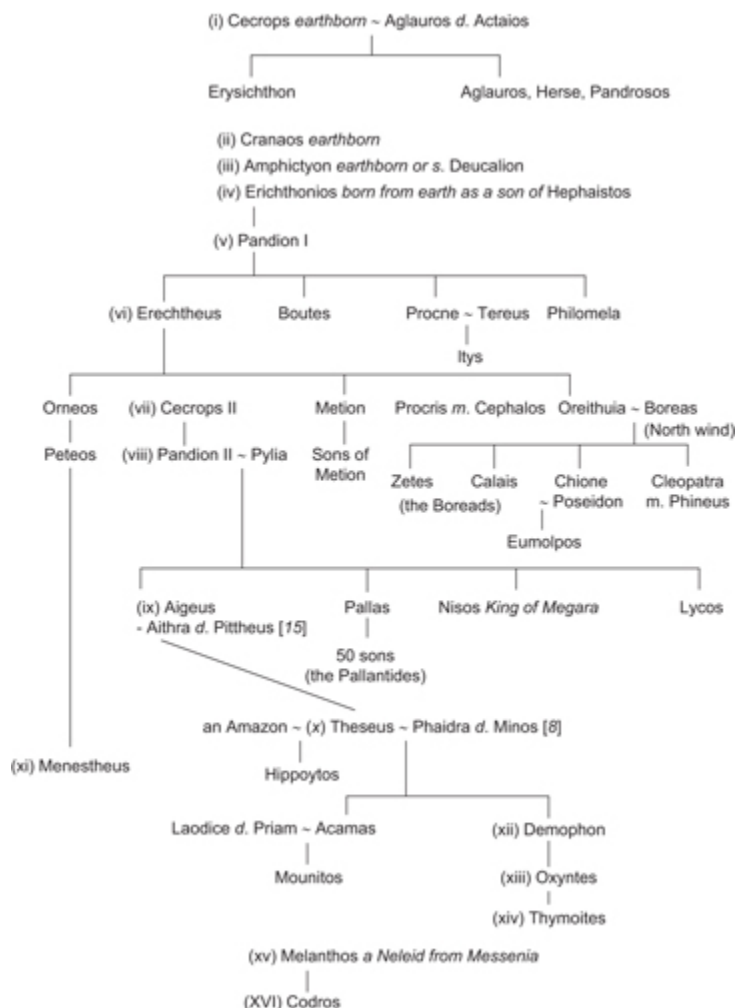


Table 20 The Arcadian royal family

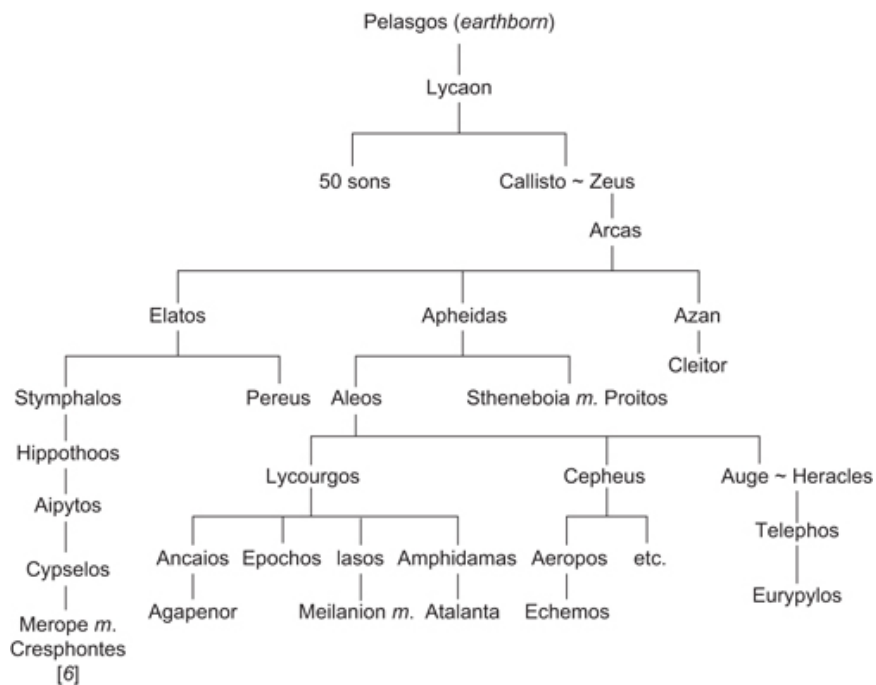
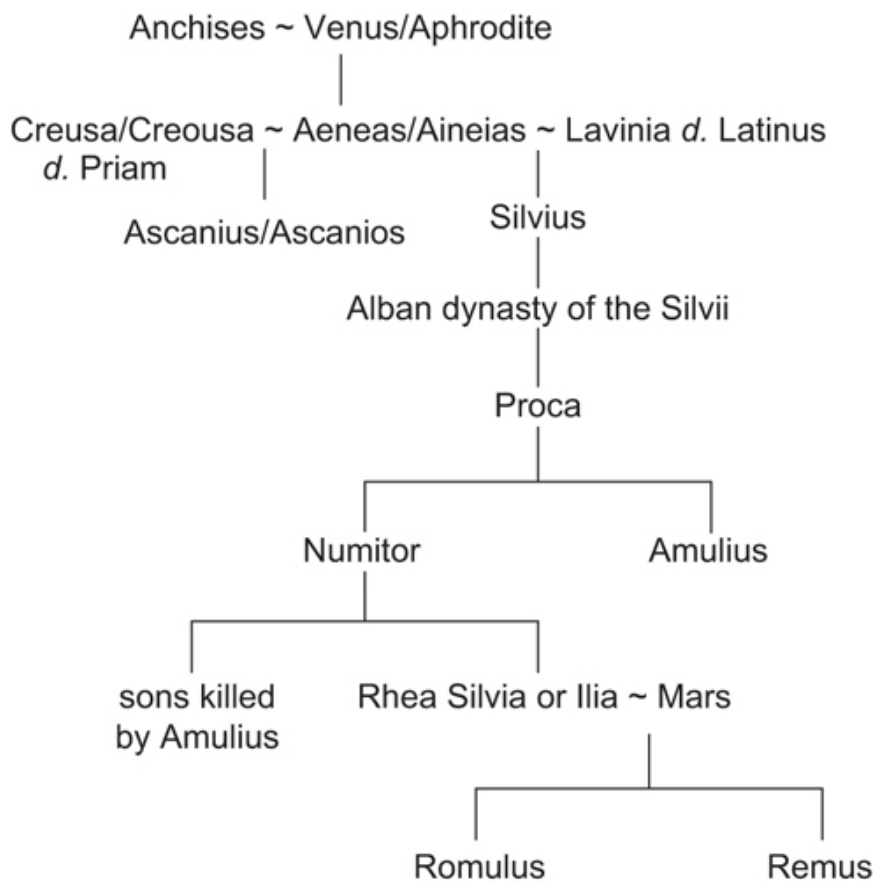


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- I. Born as a child of Kronos and Rhea 67; is swallowed at birth by Kronos but later vomited up again 68; becomes a wife or mistress of Zeus and bears Persephone to him 78; seeks to

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- I. His birth 161, 519; his nature, functions and origin 158–61; he rustles the cattle of Apollo as a new-born child, but is soon reconciled with him and is allotted his functions by Zeus 161–3.
- II. Warns *Aigisthos* not to court Klytaimnestra or harm Agamemnon 508; transfers *Alkmene* to the Isles of the Blessed 352; gives a lyre to *Amphion* 305; rapes *Apemosyne* on Rhodes 354; rescues Ares after he is imprisoned by the *Aloadai* 92; kills *Argos Panoptes* to steal the transformed *Io*

229; takes the infant *Arkas* to Maia to be reared 541; recovers the unborn *Asklepios* from his mother's body 149; sends a golden lamb into the flocks of *Atreus* 506; visits him to tell him that the gods support his claim to the Mycenaean throne 506; bribes *Battos* not to reveal that he has stolen the cattle of Apollo and punishes him for his subsequent perfidy 163; purifies the *Danaids* 234; raises *Daphnis* to heaven 211; is sent to *Deukalion* after the great flood to offer him the choice of what he most desires 403; conveys the infant *Dionysos* to Ino and Athamas 172; is sent to *Hades* to ask him to release Persephone 128; conveys *Helen* to Egypt 445; deceives Hera into suckling the infant *Herakles* 249, arms him with a sword 257, helps him in the Underworld 268, sells him at auction to Omphale 274; father of *Hermaphroditos* 164; seduces *Herse* and turns her sister Aglauros to stone 366; transfers the infant *Ion* to Delphi 408; tends to displace *Iris* as messenger of the gods 56–7; identified with *Mercurius* 164; gives *Odysseus* a herb to render him invulnerable to Kirke's spells 494 and is sent to Kalypso to order her to allow him to return home 497; plays a part in bringing *Orion* to birth 561; father of *Pan* 215, 501; recovers a golden dog stolen by *Pandareos* 502; confers speech and guile on *Pandora* 95; brings Hera, Athena and Aphrodite to Mt Ida to be judged by *Paris* 443; brings a sword to *Peleus* to enable him to defend himself in the wilds 534; guides the dead suitors of *Penelope* to the Underworld 112; helps *Perseus* to acquire the Gorgon's head 239–40, 242; visits *Philemon and Baucis* 577; sleeps with *Philonis* 435; provides a marvellous ram for the rescue of *Phrixos* 378; guides *Priam* to the Greek camp to see Achilles 158, 465; is sent by Zeus to interrogate *Prometheus* 96; restores *Protesilaos* temporarily to the world of the living 450–1; learns divinatory arts from the *Thriai* 162; is sent to compensate *Tros* for the abduction of Ganymedes 522; recovers Zeus's tendons after they are removed by *Typhon* 84, flees from Typhon 85.

POSEIDON

- I. Born as child of Kronos and Rhea 67; is swallowed at birth by Kronos but later vomited up again 68; receives the seas as his special domain when he divides the universe with Zeus and Hades 76, 98; his nature as the lord of the seas and of the earthquake 98–100; as god of horses 101–2; myths in which he competes with other deities for possession of Greek lands 102–4; he marries Amphitrite and fathers Triton and other children by her 104–7; his other children by mortal mothers 107.
- II. He causes the death of the lesser *Aias* 485–6; protects *Aineias* 585; sleeps with Iphimedeia to father the *Aloadai* 91; rescues *Amymone* from a Satyr and fathers Nauplios by her 235; fathers the divine horse *Areion* by mating with Demeter in animal form 101; prosecutes *Ares* for killing his son Halirrhothios 365; competes with *Athena* for possession of Attica 102–3, of Troizen 103; perhaps the true father of *Bellerophon* 433, gives Pegasos to him 434; hides *Centaurs* under a mountain 259; competes with *Dionysos* for Naxos 103; causes the death of *Erechtheus* for killing his son Eumolpos 369–70; fathers *Eumolpos* by Chione and rescues him after she throws him into the sea 370; helps in the defeat of the *Giants* 90; competes with *Helios* for Corinth 103; rescues *Helle* from the Hellespont and fathers a son by her 379; competes with *Hera* for Argos 103; wounded by *Herakles* 278; courts *Hestia* 140; causes the death of *Hippolytos* in response to the curse of his father Theseus 342; abducts *Hippothoe* to the Echinadian Islands and fathers Taphios by her 244; rapes Kainis and transforms her into an invulnerable man, *Kaineus* 557; sends a sea-monster against Ethiopia to punish *Kassiepeia* for a sacrilegious boast 240; renders his son *Kyknos* invulnerable and transforms him after his death 451; helps to build the walls of Troy for *Laomedon*, but sends a sea-monster when his fee is withheld 523; provides *Idas* with marvellous chariot-horses 153; sleeps with *Medusa* on a spring meadow to father Pegasos and Chrysaor 60; removes *Mestra* to Cos and fathers children by her 433; sends a bull up from the sea for *Minos*, and sends it mad 338; raises the

sea against *Odysseus* to punish him for blinding his son Polyphemos 100, 492–3, 497; arranges the construction of a refuge for *Oinopion* 563; fathers *Orion* or plays a part in bringing him to birth 561–2; falls in love with *Pelops* and removes him to Olympos 503, provides him with winged horses to enable him to win his bride 503; grants his son *Periklymenos* the power to change his shape 278; blinds *Phineus* 386; angers his wife by engaging in a love affair with *Skylia* 497; plants a golden hair in the head of *Pterelaos* to render him immortal 247; fathers the first horse *Skyphios* or *Skeironites* 102; raised by the *Telchines* 221; mates with *Theophane* in animal form to father a golden ram 379; sleeps with Aithra to father *Theseus* 342; courts *Thetis* 52; has intercourse with *Tyros* in the form of a river-god to father Pelias and Neleus 380; plots a revolt against *Zeus* 67, 82, competes with him for Aegina 103.

ZEUS

- I. Rhea brings him to birth as a son of Kronos, and hides him in Crete to save him from being swallowed by his father 68, 74–5; local traditions in which he was reared or concealed elsewhere in the Greek world 75–6; his rise to power as the third lord of the universe, as described in the succession myth 65–9; he forces Kronos to disgorge his swallowed children 68, wins power by defeating and banishing Kronos and the Titans 68–9; divides the world with Hades and Poseidon 76, 98; his nature and titles 73–4; his thunderbolt and aegis 74; his earlier wives or divine mistresses and his children by them 76–8; his marriage to Hera and children by her 78–9; local traditions relating to his marriage or first union with Hera 135–8; Zeus and Dione 80; he suppresses revolts against his rule by Typhon 82–6, and by the Giants 86–91; the Aloadae fail in a subsequent revolt 91–2; Prometheus arouses the enmity of Zeus by championing the interests of the human race 92–7; Zeus plots the outbreak of the Trojan War 437–8.
- II. He orders that *Adonis* shall be shared between Aphrodite and Persephone 199; causes *Agdistis* to spring up as his earthborn child 218; provides *Aiakos* with subjects by transforming the local ants into people 531; abducts *Aigina* and fathers Aiakos by her 530–1; causes *Alkmaion's* children to grow up immediately to enable them to avenge their father's murder 327; sleeps with *Alkmene* in the form of her husband to father Herakles 247; transforms *Alkyone* and *Keux* into birds 410; opens a chasm in the ground to save *Amphiaraos* 321; seduces or rapes *Antiope* to father Zethos and Amphion 303–4; re-routes the *Argonauts* in anger at the murder of Apsyrtos 394; condemns *Apollo* to a period of servitude for killing the *Kyklopes* 151; kills *Asklepios* for reviving the dead 151; pursues *Asterie* 189; hurls *Ate* down to earth 31; brings *Athena* to birth from his head after swallowing her mother Metis 77–8, 181, sends a storm against the Greek fleet at her request 486; supports *Atrous* in his claim to the Mycenaean throne 506; causes *Bellerophon* to fall to the earth when he tries to fly up to heaven on Pegasus 434; his part in the origin of the *cornucopia* or horn of Amaltheia 280; approaches *Danae* in the form of a shower of gold to father Perseus 238; orders the purification of the Danaids 234; causes a great flood in the age of *Deukalion* 403–4; brings *Dionysos* to birth from his thigh after the death of his mother Semele 171; punishes *Endymion* for trying to seduce Hera 411; abducts *Europa* to Crete and fathers Minos and other children by her 337; takes *Ganymedes* up to heaven and becomes his lover 522; fathers *Helen* by mating with Nemesis or Leda in bird form 438–9; ensures that *Helios* gains his special domain 43; throws *Hephaistos* down from Olympos 166; Hera tricks him into granting *Herakles* a lesser inheritance than he had intended 248, he separates Herakles and Apollo when they fight over the Delphian tripod 273, he raises Herakles to heaven 286; fathers *Hermes* by Maia 161, 519, adjudicates when Apollo accuses him of having stolen his cattle 162, grants Hermes his functions 162; allows *Hestia* to remain a virgin and grants her special privileges 140; transforms *Hippe* 410; seduces *Io*, transforms her into a cow and tries to steal the cow from Hera 228–9, fathers Epaphos by

her 230–1; strikes *Iasion* with a thunderbolt for engaging in a love affair with Demeter 132, 521; punishes *Ixion* for trying to seduce Hera 118, 554; grants Harmonia to *Kadmos* as a wife 297, sends them to Elysion 300; causes the destruction of *Kaineus* as punishment for his impiety 557; rapes or seduces *Kallisto* to father Arkas 540, turns her into a bear 541, transfers her and her son to the heavens 542; strikes *Kapaneus* with a thunderbolt to punish him for his impious boasting 320; destroys the family of *Lykaon* 539–40, turns Lykaon into a wolf 540, 542; in fable of *Momos* 27; separates Apollo and Idas when they quarrel over *Marpessa*, and allows her to choose between them 154; strikes *Menoitios* with a thunderbolt 49; advises his son *Minos* on law-making 338, helps him to impose his will on the Athenians 341; takes *Niobe*, daughter of Phoroneus, as his mistress, fathering Argos as his first mortal child 228; turns *Niobe*, daughter of Tantalos, to stone to relieve her sorrow 157, 306; inspires *Oineus* with an incestuous passion for his daughter 418; accidentally causes the death of *Pallas* while she is fighting with Athena 183; consents to Hades' abduction of *Persephone* 127, asks him to return her to the upper world 128, arranges a compromise 128; strikes *Phaethon* with a thunderbolt when he is unable to control the chariot of the Sun 45; visits *Philemon and Baucis* and grants them special privileges 577–8; transfers the *Pleiades* to the heavens 518; allows his son *Polydeukes* to share his immortality with his halfbrother Kastor 528; destroys *Salmoneus* and his city as punishment for his impious behaviour 422; grants his son *Sarpedon* an abnormally long life 350; engages in a love affair with *Semele*, but inadvertently causes her death 170–1; abducts *Sinope* 537; punishes *Sisyphos* for revealing his abduction of Aigina 117, 431, 530; adopts the children of *Styx* and orders that divine oaths should be sworn by her waters 49; grants prophetic powers to *Teiresias* 330; transfers the *Teumessian fox* and its pursuer to the heavens 247; courts *Thetis* but marries her to a mortal when warned off by Themis 52; fathers *Zagreus* by Persephone 35.